

Benicia Theater Group

2005 - 2012

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
presents

ON GOLDEN POND

By Ernest Thompson

Directed By
Wallace Henderson Ingalls

October 21 - November 12, 2005

AUDITIONS AUDITIONS AUDITIONS AUDITIONS

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP

'ON GOLDEN POND'

BY ERNEST THOMPSON

PROPOSED AUDITIONS:
SUNDAY AUGUST 21, 2005 1-4PM
601 FIRST STREET, BENICIA

&
MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 2005 7-9PM
HISTORIC B.D.E.S. HALL
140 WEST J STREET, BENICIA
COLD READ FROM SCRIPT

CALL 707 745-2113 FOR AUDITION INFORMATION
or BOTTG BUSINESS LINE: 707 746-1269
or E-MAIL MOESDADDY@EARTHLINK.NET

PERFORMANCE WEEKENDS: OCT 21 TO NOV 12, 2005
NO PAY. REHEARSALS 3HRS/EVE-4X WEEK

4 MEN (13-80), 2 WOMEN (30-80)

THE STORY IS ABOUT THE ENDURING LOVE OF A LONG MARRIAGE,
THE TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A STUBBORN MAN
AND HIS RESENTFUL DAUGHTER, AND
THE EFFECT OF A YOUNG BOY'S COMING INTO AN OLD MAN'S LIFE
BEAUTIFUL!

AUDITIONS AUDITIONS AUDITIONS AUDITIONS

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 19, 2005

BENICIA HERALD

WEDNESDAY
Oct. 19, 2005

Art imitates life for theater family

By TS Owens
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Benicia's award-winning theater group opens its 42nd season Friday with a poignant play about families, survivors, death and love—with a local twist.

"On Golden Pond" is best known as the last movie Henry Fonda made. It included his daughter Jane and Katharine Hepburn in 1981, but the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is presenting not the Fonda's version, but the O'Briens'.

This Pond has its own father-daughter duo: Benician and Arty-winning actors



Real life father-daughter Robert and Siobhan O'Brien play the literary father-daughter Thayers in BOTTG's play "On Golden Pond" opening Friday.

PHOTO BY TS OWENS

THEATER

Continued from page A1

Robert and Siobhan O'Brien as Norman and Chelsea Thayer. They bring the reality of family relationships to the roles, those ever-present layers of emotional histories that electrify all human relationships between loved ones.

Pain and the reality of human mortality are not just in the play, but part of the lives of the cast. Director Wallace Ingalls of Napa is a cancer survivor and Siobhan O'Brien was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in February. She was given an all clear by doctors just two weeks ago.

"She will wear a wig in the

show," said her mother June. "She lost her hair during chemo."

The 33-year-old actress helped the BOTTG win two ARTYS (for "Moon over Buffalo" and "Lost in Yonkers") and has always wanted to do Pond with her 73-year-old actor father, who has performed it twice before.

"She talked him into it," said June. "He was in Sutter Solano earlier this year after stomach surgery and fell out of bed. He had a blood clot in the brain and was airlifted to Mt. Diablo where he was unconscious for five days. His memory is still affected, and this play is hard for him, but he's getting it."

Ernest Thompson's script is about how each of us sails the golden pond and how we

choose to deal with the rough waves that rock all our lives.

The senior O'Brien said it is a dream to perform with his only daughter. The two have paired before in two plays, but this is a return for him to the Benicia stage in a play about the love of family.

Five of the six cast members have a Benicia connection. The role made famous by Katharine Hepburn, Ethel Thayer, is played by non-native Julie Helms, a 72-year-old from Moraga and keen proponent of the show. She gets to kiss O'Brien, a.k.a. "the Old Poop," as a reward after braving the bridge traffic to get here.

Pond tackles the themes of masculinity that doesn't allow men to cry, show pain or emotional vulnerability, of how

humans face their own deaths and of family feuds that drive unforgiving members apart and the power of enduring love.

It's directed by Ingalls, who has a sharpened sensitivity after several personal near-death experiences that forges a bond with the O'Briens.

Also in the cast are David Hansen, Don Riblett and Dominic Peters.

On Golden Pond opens Friday with a champagne gala and runs from Oct. 21 to Nov. 12 at the BDES Hall, 140 West J Street. There is a special performance on Thursday, Nov. 10, with proceeds going to Food 4 Cancer.

Tickets (\$15/\$12) are available at the door. Call 746-1269 for more information.

TUESDAY
OCT. 25, 2005



BOTTG

Continued from page A1

soften once-hard hearts? Can it thaw frozen relationships faced with the silence of forever?

I have to confess I had to squeeze my review of Pond into a hectic week, taking it onto the tail end of an already-long day, and without dinner, at that. I grabbed a seat at the preview/dress rehearsal on Thursday and sat among a group from Vallejo's Genesis House who had helped schlep heavy loads up the steep stairs at the BDES Hall.

This was not a sophisticated audience, which was even more fun, because by their laughter and applause, they loved this two-hour play of much talk and little action.

Ernest Thompson's banter between Ethel and Norman Thayer, celebrating their 44th year on Golden Pond somewhere in Maine and facing the inevitability of death, is sharp but not hurtful, wise but not wounding, witty without sarcasm.

Director Wallace Henderson Ingalls injected as much action as he could, even making the stagehands into a hilarious chorus of four stooges who whistle and sing their way through the scene changes.

But the heart of Pond is in the lines; those words that can be golden or black depending on mood of the speaker and the emotions of the listener. Will father Norman and only daughter Chelsea ever wade deep enough into the pond to get past the rough water and float in the golden glow of family? Will

determined mother Ethel be able to broker a peace before they part forever?

Julie Helms, with her wonderful smile and easy manner, is a perfect Ethel, perhaps most tellingly when she leaves both behind to ask Chelsea exactly when, given all the afflictions suffered by her 80-year-old father, a friendship between them could begin.

Robert Parke O'Brien is Norman Thayer: prickly, hiding his feelings with teasing, keeping everyone at bay with barbs, but still, somehow, endearing and loveable—especially when he lets down his guard with young Billy (Dominic Peters). They play off each other superbly.

John O'Brien as Chelsea is every daughter who ever wanted approval from her daddy and didn't get it, a stretch since she obviously adores her father when he isn't portraying Norman.

Would-be Chelsea lover and Charlie the mailman David Hansen must be at once a friend and failed flame while Don Riblett as Bill must appear a craven California dentist afraid of bears but Chelsea's savior.

Ten-year-old Peters will slow down so his words are clearer and the technical difficulties with the sound that made it appear the cabin had a bug zapper will be fixed. Spend time admiring all the stuff gathered to simulate a beloved summer cabin jumbled with years of family junk. I liked the ceramic dog. BOTTG's trademark table centerpieces are clever loon decoys, reminding me of the days when I regularly heard the haunting cries of loons.

Pond reminds me of a lot: it

BOTTG scores a hit with 'On Golden Pond'

Review by TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Call them the golden years, golden girls or the good night, death and decline by any other name is old age and is not a popular theme among American audiences accustomed to worshipping youth.

But "On Golden Pond," the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's opening play of their new season, is about exactly that: the twilight years when you can't count on another trip to the summer place because you can't count on another summer.

Does such knowledge



Ethel (Julie Helms) and Norman (Robert O'Brien) are the heart of the BOTTG's 42nd season opener "On Golden Pond," which opened this

See BOTTG, page A1

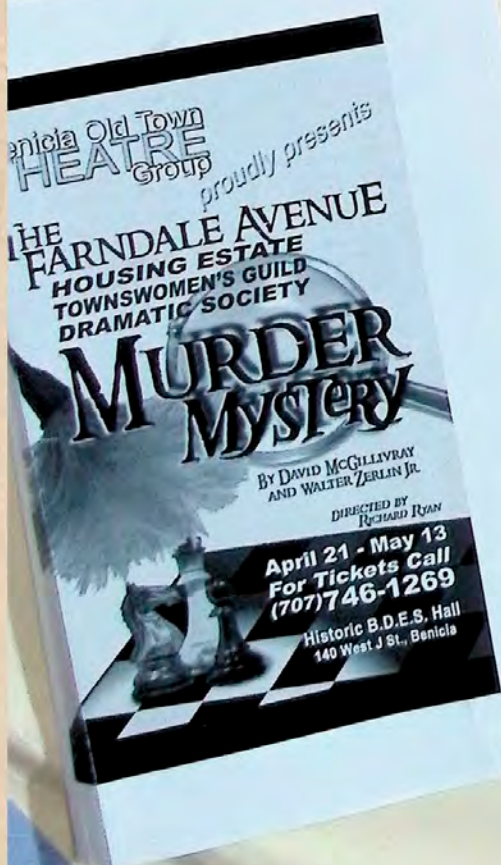
PHOTO BY TS OWEN

teems with life, with complex intimate relationships, with the stuff of human interaction set to the music of laughter and promise of redemption as we all

head gently into that good night.
It plays at the BDES Hall, 140 West J St., weekends through Nov. 12. A special per-

formance Thursday, Nov. 10, will benefit "Cooking for Cancer" as a gesture from the cast, which includes cancer survivors and those who love

them.
A bar and desserts are at each show. Call 746-1269 for \$15/\$12/\$10 tickets.



BOTTG PRESENTS A MURDER MYSTERY
The Benicia Old Town Theater Group will present "The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery" from April 21 through May 13, starring Rose Marie Sweeney, Stephen Scott and Cate Ullman. The production, directed by Richard Ryan, is a wacky whodunit where nothing turns out as planned.
Friday and Saturday shows start at 8 p.m., and Sunday shows start at 4 p.m. in the B.D.E.S. Hall at 140 West J Street.



Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group

proudly presents

THE
FARNDALE AVENUE
HOUSING ESTATE
TOWNSWOMEN'S GUILD
DRAMATIC SOCIETY

**MURDER
MYSTERY**

BY DAVID MCGILLIVRAY
AND WALTER ZERLIN JR.

DIRECTED BY
RICHARD RYAN

April 21 - May 13
For Tickets Call
(707) 746-1269

Historic B.D.E. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia

BENICIA HERALD

FRIDAY
APRIL 14, 2006

New BOTTG show is a play within a play

By Jennifer Gentile
ASSISTANT EDITOR

It is almost opening night for the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's latest show, and the director, crew and five-member cast are busy perfecting the play within a play.

Called the, "Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery," the story is a play written by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin, according to a press release about the show. Opening night in Benicia is April 21.

In the play, a townswomen's

guild attempts to put on a murder mystery called "Murder at Checkmate Manor," which includes a fashion show in the intermission. Director Richard Ryan said comedy ensues as the players in the murder mystery forget their lines and mess up their timing, sets fall apart and several other things go wrong.

"I directed this about six years ago in Marin, and I thought it would be a perfect show for this group," Ryan said. "It's the most fun I've ever had as a director."

Ryan said this is the second show he has directed in Benicia, the first being, "Run for Your Wife."

In casting this show, Ryan said, "I wanted people who could work well together, who could have fun in the show, who could do a good British accent and who had done some improv work." The English accent is required because it is a British play, he said, and the improv work was preferred because the cast members do have some interaction with the audience, like greeting guests before they take their seats.

Among those who made the cut was Vallejoan Rose Marie Sweeney, who will play guild chairwoman Mrs. Reese. She will be joined by Steven Scott of Vallejo as stage manager Gordon

Pugh, Catie Ullman of San Francisco as Felicity, Coleen Walsh of Fairfield as Audrey and Vicki Zabarte of Hercules as Thelma.

Ryan said in the five weeks or so of rehearsals, the cast has amazed him. Of the show as a whole, he said, "It's coming together."

"It is a difficult play, first of all, because all of the players have multiple roles," the director said. "They have what we call their Farndale characters, and then they all play many parts within the murder mystery itself."

He summed up all of the chal-

BOTTG

Continued from page A1

lenges of the multi-layered production in joking, "It's not easy to be bad; it's a lot of hard work."

The B.D.E.S. Hall at 140 W. J Street is hosting the show on weekends from April 21 through May 13. Friday and Saturday shows begin at 8 p.m. and Sun-

day shows start at 4 p.m. For \$20 on opening night, patrons can see the show and be included in a champagne gala.

Tickets for Friday and Saturday shows are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors and students with an ID and \$10 for kids 10 and under. On Sundays, adult tickets are \$12; senior and student tickets are \$10; and child tickets are \$8. Reservations are available by calling 746-1269, and tickets will also be available at the door.

Lots of laughs at BOTTG play

review by Jennifer Gentile
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Laughs were abundant and came early at last weekend's showing of the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's latest comedy, which is playing again today, Saturday and Sunday.

The relatively small group of about 10 in "The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery" is so character from the very beginning, adopting British accents and pretending to be a

group of thespians putting on a murder mystery. Also from the start, nothing goes right in the guild's production of "Murder at Checkmate Manor."

To eliminate any confusion from the outset, the "Dramatic Society Murder Mystery" is a play within a play. Director Richard Ryan has said, "It's one of the most hilarious shows I've ever directed where we get to make chaos for the audience."

This is Ryan's second directing effort for BOTTG.

Among the first people the

audience meets is guild chairwoman Phoebe Reese, played by Rose Marie Sweeney, who soon confides to the audience, "I'm beginning to think our productions are cursed." Rather than being cursed, the audience quickly realizes that the guild's show is a hilarious disaster.

As opposed to any normal production, when actors are desperate to remember their lines and follow their cues, the actors in the BOTTG show have worked hard to perfect the tim-

See BOTTG, page A2



Coleen Walsh, left, and Vicki Zabarte in BOTTG's spring play.

A2 THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2006

BOTTG

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ing and execution of things going wrong. Each of the actors plays several roles, which includes their guild character and that character's parts in "Checkmate Manor." In this unique production, the BOTTG actors must pretend to be in a show while already putting on a show, which they do convincingly.

THURSDAY
JULY 6, 2006

Dance event to raise cash for Benicia's theater group

By Jennifer Gentile
ASSISTANT EDITOR

While the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is perhaps most knowledgeable about getting laughs, on Saturday, it is aiming to make people dance.

To finance operations in its upcoming 42nd season, BOTTG is holding an "Old Town Boogie" at the B.D.E.S. Hall, located at 140 West J St., from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Dyanne Vojvoda of the BOTTG said the group decided to try a dance because there are simply not enough opportunities to dance locally.

"We did wine tastings for about nine years, which were successful," she said, "and we have done a couple of garage sales, which were popular. This year, we just decided to do something different."

Supplying the music for the event is Bay Area group Wall of Blues, which includes former Benician and harmonica player Joe "Flambo" Guistino. Benicians who attended the Mardi Gras dance at the Yacht Club may remember Wall of Blues as the group that kept the crowd out of their seats all evening long, Vojvoda said.

"They are really an ensemble group and very talented," she

said of the six-member band. She described the music as very danceable and a mix of blues, rock and dance music.

Attendees may work up a thirst on the dance floor, so the event features a no-host bar where beer, wine, soda and water are available. Because alcohol is sold, no one under age 21 is admitted.

Advance-sale tickets are available at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce and Bookshop Benicia for \$15, and tickets are also sold at the door for \$20.

In the past, the BOTTG's annual fundraiser has raised as much as \$5,000. This year,

Vojvoda said she would be pleased if 150 to 200 people attended the event.

"Operations are expensive," she said. "Every year, it seems like the cost of renting equipment, getting rights to a show and other expenses keep going up. Without the fundraiser, it would be very difficult."

Aside from the benefit, the BOTTG is auditioning for its fall production in August, a two-man show called "Greater Tuna." Vojvoda said the comedy is about a radio station in Tuna, Texas.

"(The show) requires tremendously talented actors," she said. For further information about



Look for "Wall of Blues" at the BOTTG fund raiser.

the show or auditions, Vojvoda is available at 746-5526. The BOTTG is online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org and can be contacted by phone at 746-1269.

Benicia Old Town Theatre
presents

"BENICIA OLD TOWN BOOGIE"

KICK UP YOUR
HAPPY FEET
TO THE TUNES OF

JULY 8TH
8PM - 11PM
B.D.E.S. HALL
140 WEST "J" ST.



"WALL OF BLUES"
FEATURING
JOE "FLAMBO" GUISTINO

CALL FOR TICKET INFO AT 746-1269

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AT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE &
AT BOOKSHOP BENICIA OR \$20 PER PERSON
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NO ONE UNDER 21 ADMITTED

R & L Advertising's

THE MONTHLY
GRAPEVINE

Vol. 13 No. 1 Circulation over 40,000

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group

proudly presents

GREATER
TUNA

(The Comedy with
"TEX" appeal)

By Jaston Williams, Joe Soars and Ed Howard

STARRING
Richard Ryan and James Brewer

Directed by David Eagle

October 27 - November 18 2006

at Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Historic B.D.E.S. Hall • 140 West J St., Benicia, CA

For Tickets Call (907) 746-1269

www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org

BENICIA HERALD

Auditions start Sunday for "Greater Tuna"

By Jennifer Gentile
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Starting this weekend, The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and the Solano Repertory Company are looking for two men to play multiple roles in their first joint production. The auditions for "Greater Tuna" are Sunday and Monday in Benicia. The show, directed by David Lagle, opens at the Missouri Street Theatre, home of the SRC, on Sept. 29, and at the B.D.E.S. Hall, home of the BOTTG, on Oct. 27.

Lagle, a Benicia resident, is an experienced actor and stage manager, said BOTTG President Dyanne Voyvoda, adding that he is nominated for an Arty award for his direction in BOTTG's production of "Over the River and Through the Woods." He also performed both roles in the San Francisco production of "Tony and Tina's Wedding." Appointments are required for auditions, which are from 1 to 4 p.m. on Aug. 20 and from 7 to 9 p.m. on Aug. 21.

An online synopsis says "Greater Tuna" is the third in a series of three plays authored by Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard, which was followed by "Tuna Christmas" and "Red, White and Tuna." The synopsis continues that the play is both a fond look at and satire about life and attitudes in the South.

Voyvoda and others involved in the production have said that the two groups acquired rights to the show around the same time. Rather than putting on two separate productions, the theatre companies decided to collaborate instead. Thespians skilled enough to portray Tuna's multiple inhabitants are invited to call (707) 746-5526 for an audition appointment. Each chosen actor receives a stipend of \$1,000.

Voyvoda said the winning candidates would get a call back on Tuesday. Preparation begins shortly after, she said, and the actors should expect to rehearse about four nights a week. Sunday's auditions are at 601 First St. in Benicia. Monday auditions are at the B.D.E.S. Hall, located at 140 W. J St. in Benicia.

THE DAILY REPUBLIC
AND FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY SERVICES
PRESENT

The Artys

22nd
Annual
Gala

Celebrating Solano County Theater
Sunday, September 10, 2006 • 6 p.m.

THE DAILY REPUBLIC:
Writer Foy McNaughton, Publisher Bill James, Features Editor Patty Amador, Arts Writer Stephanie Jucor,
Video Production by Daniel A. Brown, Program Design by Katie Shaddock

CITY OF FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY SERVICES:
Assistant Director of Community Services Jill Bragg, Technical Theater Coordinator Darsen Long, Theater
Technician Crystal Brandon, Program Coordinator Tom Work, Program Coordinator Todd Grames, Program
Coordinator Maureen Lillemoe and Facility Maintenance Supervisor Oliver Young

2005-2006 ARTY JUDGES:
Cindy Allas, Vici Avante, Valory Degree, Rebecca Bowen, Diane Castleman, Don Bond, Fran Bond, Sue Burg,
Claire Correll, Gary Darville, Raymond Demos, Lesley DePinto, Janet Duhé, Susan Felt, John Galvagno, Mark Garcia,
Mona Lisa Garcia, Donna Gouwen, Joanne Greger, Bobbie Grumling, Joe Guistino, Patricia Hall, Jill Hopkins,
Ellen Kirkland, Stacey Low, Richard Lucas, Paula McConnell, Yvette Mosberger, Shirley Nunes, John O'Neill,
Pauling, Robert Price, Kathy Puchner, Scott Robarge, Kevin Ryan, Melissa Shelby, Sharon Walton, Carole Warren,
Polly Williams, Nancy Yingst and Lorraine Yount

SPECIAL THANKS TO:
MUSICIANS: Joe Anderson (piano), Steve Hansen (bass), Bob Nadler (drums), and Walt Wadenius (trumpet);
the Artys performers, presenters, ushers, volunteers and all the Artys "behind the scenes" workers.
The show could not go on without you!

ARTY PARTY CHAMPAGNE RECEPTION

FAIRFIELD CENTER FOR CREATIVE ARTS
1050 TEXAS STREET, FAIRFIELD, CA 94533

No flash photography or videotaping during the awards presentation, please

Solano Repertory Company &
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group present...



By Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard • Directed by David Lagle
Starring Richard Ryan and Jim Brewer

The comedy about Texas' third smallest town...where the
Lion's Club is too liberal and Patsy Cline never dies.
The hilarious show, which began more than 25 years ago as a
simple party skit by Joe Sears, Jaston Williams and Ed Howard,
has gone on to be one of the most successful political satires
at theatres from San Francisco to Bangor, Maine.

GREATER TUNA

Repertory Company and Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, are
combining talent and producing Greater Tuna as a joint venture.
Both companies have an extensive history of award-winning
theatre, and Greater Tuna is no stranger to awards.

The hilarious show, which began more than 25 years ago as a
simple party skit by creators Joe Sears, Jaston Williams and Ed
Howard, has gone on to be one of the most successful political
satires at theatres from San Francisco to Bangor, Maine. The
show's special brand of rural humor earned Sears a Tony
nomination for Best Actor on Broadway in 1994. Greater Tuna
has become one of the most produced plays in America. The
action, which takes place among quaint, loud, redneckish, and
dear people on a late summer day, is a love
and-a-half you'll never forget.

Come experience one of the best nights
of theatre. See Greater Tuna at Missouri
Street Theatre from September 29 to
October 21, 2006 or at Benicia Old
Town Theatre from October 27 to
November 18, 2006. Show times on
Fridays and Saturdays are at 8 p.m.
and Sunday matinees are at 4 p.m.
For tickets or more information call
(707) 422-1595 or visit
www.mosstreettheatre.com



Times-Herald

SUNDAY OUTLOOK

'Tuna' is joint effort

By RICH FREEDMAN
Times-Herald staff writer

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group was
itching to do "Greater Tuna." So was the Solano
Repertory Company. David Rodgers Jr., the
production manager at the Missouri Street Theatre
and Arts Academy in Fairfield, had already been
asked to direct "Greater Tuna" for the BOTTG.
The prospect of competing productions didn't
appeal to Rodgers. Rather than a duel at 20 re-
hearsals, he had a better idea: Combine the two.
"Since I knew the SRC was doing it, too, I figured
what better way to join companies together?" he
said. "So I arranged the meeting, and here we are."
Not that there aren't challenges involved in the
joint venture. "At first,



Courtesy photo

'GREATER TUNA' unites the Solano Repertory Company
and the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group in a joint
production of the two-man play.

both groups had concerns," said Rodgers, who
explained how both companies would share costs
and save money — and, at the same time, "produce
great quality in both Fairfield and Benicia."

Rodgers eventually "removed my name from the
directors' pool," with David Lagle selected for
that job. Rodgers remained as production
manager "to assure
(See AUDITIONS, B3)



Auditions: "Greater Tuna"
When: 1 to 4 p.m. Aug. 20,
7 to 9 p.m. Aug. 21
Contact: 746-5526
Wanted: Two men, ages
25 to 60, to play multiple
characters

Times-Herald
Sunday, August 13, 2006

Auditions

(From B1)

everything runs smoothly."

As with the original "Tuna" production, there are only two featured performers and both will earn \$1,000 each for the extended performance engagements that run Sept. 29 through Oct. 22, at the Solano Rep and Oct. 27 through Nov. 18 in Benicia.

Though Lagle has final say on the actors, all other decisions are made by a committee of an equal number of BOTTG and SRC selects the actors, Rodgers said.

"Everything else is voted on," he added. The joint venture is a first in Solano "as far as I know," Rodgers said. "And I think it's definitely going to be a popular trend. It shares the costs and exposes two different audience bases. We are waiting to see how it works out. I would love this to be the beginning of all these companies to work together to accomplish the main goal of great theater in Solano County."

Though the SRC is a professional theater company and BOTTG "volunteers," Rodgers said he looks at both as "trying to bring professional quality theater to our audiences. One is not better than the other." The concept of "Greater Tuna" began as a simple party skit based on a political cartoon more than 20 years ago in Austin, Texas. Creators Joe Sears, Jaston Williams and Ed Howard were the authors who parlayed the sketch into a critically acclaimed production, which has entertained audiences across the country ever since.

Greater Tuna is the comedy about Texas' third smallest town, where the Lion's Club is too liberal and Patsy Cline never dies. The eclectic band of citizens that make up this

town are portrayed by only two performers, making this satire on life in rural America even more delightful as they depict all of the inhabitants of Tuna — men, women, children and animals.

The early tour dates found an instant audience coast to coast as the show played to packed houses in San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston and Hartford before original stars Sears and Williams found themselves performing Greater Tuna for more than a year Off-Broadway at Circle in the Square Theatre. This successful New York run led to an HBO Special produced by Norman Lear which took the "Tuna" phenomenon to every city in America. By 1983, Greater Tuna was the most produced play in the United States with schools, colleges, community and professional theatres all anxious to add the hit comedy to their repertoire.

Greater Tuna's popularity crossed the Atlantic in 1984 as the highlight of Scotland's famed Edinburgh Festival. Back at home, the Marines Memorial Theatre in San Francisco began a local production of Greater Tuna which ran continuously for a record-breaking seven years. The demand for a sequel then became so great that writers Williams, Sears and Howard created "A Tuna Christmas" in which the much beloved citizens of Tuna contribute their special brand of humor to that holiday for their appreciative audiences nationwide.

In December of 1994, A Tuna Christmas took Broadway by storm, playing to rave reviews and turning the toughest critics into "Tuna" fans in return they presented Sears with the esteemed honor of a Tony Award nomination for Best Actor in a Play. To complete the Tuna Trilogy the creators have written the final installment entitled Red, White and Tuna, which is touring nationally.

BENICIA HERALD

GOOD MORNING!
THURSDAY
AUG. 24, 2006

Cemetery's needs are difficult to meet

By Josh Fernandez
STAFF WRITER

Benicia's City Cemetery has been described as a historic asset with much to offer the community, but restoration workers say they are running low on the funding and manpower required to keep up the costly maintenance.

The Cemetery Restoration Committee has been working at the City Cemetery for the past six years, counting on donations and volunteers to repair thousands of dollars worth of damage from weather, roots and vandali-

sm. Committee member Karen Burns said much work remains to be done and resources are dwindling.

Burns said the city helps with some of the small maintenance duties, like removing fallen trees and mowing the lawn, but the tombstone maintenance is left to the committee.

"Today, the City of Benicia's Parks and Community Services Department is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep...but most of the disheartening problems facing the department are the literally hundreds of historic

tombstones that have been deliberately overturned and defaced by vandalism in the past years," a City Cemetery pamphlet explains.

Burns said the costly tombstone maintenance is paid for solely by donations from community members and businesses. "Silva Memorial has been doing all restoration work at a remarkably reduced rate," Burns said.

To help with restoration, the Cemetery often hires workers from The Genesis House, a drug rehabilitation facility in Vallejo, according to Burns. Last week,

two workers from The Genesis House assisted with ivy removal from some of the grounds, and according to Burns, the men uncovered a group of tombstones that were unnoticed for the past several years.

"You would have thought they were finding gold," Burns said of the men who uncovered the tombstones. The men uncovered six grave sites, all of which dated back to the late 1800s, according to Burns.

"It was amazing," Burns said. Another committee member, Bud Lannen, was also surprised by the hidden tombstones and said he is grateful that the Genesis House was able to help out with the masses of ivy that plagued the grounds.

Lannen has been on the Cemetery Restoration Committee for over three years and said he has been having a hard time getting funding and manpower for bigger projects like tombstone restoration.

"We have 25 (tombstones) to be repaired in one bid for \$4,700," Lannen said. He added, "I sent out nine letters to businesses and only two have responded. Lannen said the majority of the \$4,700 still remains to be funded."

Lannen said he has gone to the city in hopes of a donation and has been unsuccessful. However, he said he would keep trying businesses and private



Bud Lannen looks over an area of recently-cleared space at the Benicia City Cemetery

PHOTO BY STACEY MILLER

See Cemetery, page A2

GOOD MORNING!
THURSDAY
SEPT. 7, 2006

Cemetery tour to show off restoration work

By John R. Moses
EDITOR

Just in time for otherworldly pursuits, October plays host to the Benicia Historical Society's Benicia City Cemetery Tour.

The annual event happens Oct. 7 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. It celebrates progress made on restoration of aging and vandalized headstones and memorials at the Gold Rush-era portion of the cemetery.

It's also a chance to see the modern side of the well-functioning cemetery and pay respects to all of those buried there.

"We started out trying to do all the work ourselves," said Bud Lannen of the Benicia Historical Society Cemetery Restoration Committee. The committee has 10 members and began with 128 damaged graves on a list compiled by society member Michael Hayes.

The most "high-profile" change at the cemetery is the addition of a head to a formerly headless statue.

There are 67 other headstones that have been restored through monument company Silva's Designers of Lasting Memorials. A bid was put out for 25 more repairs, but that money dried up and now the event will go to help raise the needed \$4,700.

"That will pretty much get all the major damage repaired," Lannen said.

One key repair is a multi-piece memorial from the 1850s that some vandals back in the 70s pulled apart with what must have been a hefty truck. Also in need of repair is a brick monument base.



Old iron work and pioneer graves mark the oldest section of Benicia City Cemetery.

PHOTO BY STACEY MILLER

The brick has fallen out. Members of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group will splice things up by appearing in period character costumes.

Volunteers will dig up old tales of the historic cemetery's history. For instance, the cemetery once had an entrance that went straight up that daunting West Second Street hill. One

exactly a pioneer stairway to heaven, but certainly a steep grade.)

"That's back when they used horses and buggies. It must have been quite a climb," Lannen said. Admission is free for the whole family. Taxonomists are gladly accepted.

Remember, you can't take it with you.

CEMETERY

Continued from page A1

donors. "I'll beg and I'll borrow," Lannen said, "but I won't steal!" Burns said she is also worried

about funding problems for the cemetery's restoration. She said what the cemetery needs most is money and volunteers.

"We are a dedicated group, but we need help," Burns said. "If anyone is interested in working, I will gladly oversee it."

A Historic Cemetery Tour is on Oct. 7 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Docents will be available at five historic areas within the cemetery to answer questions and talk about the people who are buried there, according to Burns.

For more information on donations or volunteering, please email Karen Burns at burnskaren1@msn.com

The Benicia Historical Society

Cemetery Restoration Committee
Invites you, your friends and family to our 8th annual
Benicia City Cemetery Tour

Fun & educational for the entire family!

Saturday
October 7th
10 am - 2 pm

Admission is FREE

Donations to help restore our
City Cemetery are gladly accepted!

We have repaired the "headless Lady"!



We have also completed 68 more historic headstone restorations with the monument company "Silva's Designers of Lasting Memorials"!

We have identified many many more historic headstones that need to be restored. Won't you help with a generous donation today?

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTTG) will have some of their members in period character costumes. Come out and join the fun and learn about our fantastic historic Cemetery!

The City Cemetery is located just off East 2nd St. Take Riverhill Rd. (across from McDonald's) and you will go straight into the cemetery.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 707-745-1822



THE SUNDAY TIMES

CONTRA COSTA

anel restores cemetery headstones

A BENICIA: Burial ground has a history dating to 1847 and is the final resting place of important figures to area

By Danielle Samaniego
TIMES STAFF WRITER

No one even realized Bridget Connelly rested here.

Buried under three feet of overgrown ivy, her headstone was discovered within the Benicia City Cemetery through the foliage more than a month ago. She died in 1871.

"When they uncovered it, they acted like they found gold," said Karen Burns, a member of the city cemetery restoration committee, an affiliate of the city's historical society. "The next day, they brought flowers for her grave."

Through the persistent efforts of the committee, members have worked tirelessly to restore the



DRESSED IN 1800s attire, Kay Hawks, left, Teresa Knight and Kristina Plimton, 9, serve as docents at the Benicia City Cemetery.

restoration of numerous gravesites dating back to the cemetery's inception in 1847. More than \$74,000 in donations has been raised since 2001.

as the headless lady. Her husband's family lineage is linked to the Bowie knife fame.

Bowie's story is one of many buried here. Committee members are trying to get the best place of restoration involving another 22 headstones taken care of but are nearly \$5,000 short. The group's annual cemetery tour, complete with docents and volunteers from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTTG), was held Saturday in hopes of bringing attention to their cause.

At the end of Riverhill Drive atop a hillside overlooking the Carquinez Strait, the site offers one of the best views in the area. More than 4,000 people are interred throughout the 24 acres, and it is still in use. It is the final place for numerous Benicia pioneers such as Edward Van Pelt, a former sea captain who established the first general store

Docents- BOTYG
for
Benicia City Cemetery Tour
Oct. 7- 2006



Kay



Paul Kay Kay Christine Norma Jeanne



Christine



Teri



Maggie Terry Deanne



Maggie



Donna



Paul



Kay Donna June



David



Karen



Luann



Luann Teresa



Danni



Teresa



June



Deanne



Danni

Solano Repertory Company and Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
proudly presents

GREATER TUNA

(The Comedy with "TEX" appeal)
By Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard
STARRING
Richard Ryan and James Brewer
Directed by David Lagle

September 29 - October 21, 2006
at Missouri Street Theatre
and
October 27 - November 18, 2006
at Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

Missouri Street Theatre
1125 Missouri Street, Suite 1000
Fairfield, CA
For Tickets Call (707) 422-1598

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J. St., Benicia, CA
For Tickets Call (707) 746-1269
www.benicioldtowntheatregroup.com

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Solano Repertory Company & Benicia Old Town Theatre Group present...

GREATER TUNA

By Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard
Directed by David Lagle • Starring Richard Ryan and James Brewer

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Fri/Sat, 8PM
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Tickets - 707-422-1598

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Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street, Benicia, CA 94510
For groups of 10 or more call 707-746-1269
For tickets & reservations go to
www.benicioldtowntheatregroup.com

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Tickets - \$20

"GREATER TUNA" *GROUP DISCOUNTS

GREETINGS FROM THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP:

WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOUR GROUP OF TEN OR MORE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR GROUP DISCOUNT. IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST VISIT, WE HOPE IT WILL NOT BE YOUR LAST! OUR SOLANO COUNTY ARTY-AWARD WINNING NON-PROFIT COMMUNITY THEATRE HAS BEEN ENTERTAINING CROWDS FOR THE PAST FORTY-TWO YEARS. GATHER YOUR FRIENDS! *GROUP DISCOUNT ONLY AVAILABLE IN BENICIA.

FEW SHOWS HAVE SUSTAINED THE LONGEVITY AND POPULARITY THAT "GREATER TUNA" HAS ENJOYED OVER THE YEARS. IT IS A HILARIOUS COMEDY ABOUT TEXAS' THIRD SMALLEST TOWN, WHERE THE LION'S CLUB IS TOO LIBERAL AND PATSY CLINE NEVER DIES. THE ECLECTIC BAND OF CITIZENS, INCLUDING MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN, THAT MAKE UP THIS TOWN ARE PORTRAYED BY TWO TALENTED ACTORS.

RICHARD RYAN AND JIM BREWER.

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or EMAIL www.benicioldtowntheatregroup.com

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Solano Repertory Company and Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
proudly presents

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By KEVIN RYAN
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

FAIRFIELD — It's a sizzling, sweaty, late-summer Texas day in not-so-mythical Greater Tuna; the third smallest town in Texas and a breeding school for bigotry.

Sobering and silly in its narrow-mindedness, Tuna is a town that applauds high school essays such as "Human Rights - Why Bother" and bans "Roots" for "only showing one side of the slavery issue."

Written in 1984 and masterfully presented at Missouri Street Theatre, "Greater Tuna" balances biting satire and comedic wit with almost respectful affection. The audience feasts on a Tuna casserole comprised of the lives of 20 of Greater Tuna's citizens - all played by only two male actors.

The play starts out with the hysterical morning broadcast of Thurston and Arles on Tuna's own Radio Station, OKKK, with its measly 275 watts. In Tuna, it's OK to have a radio station trumpeting the Ku Klux Klan, whose trifling wattage amply illuminates the dim thinking of townsfolk.

Through a cavalcade of hilarious and pathetic characters, we embrace small-town scurrilous scandals, fumbling foibles and sincere but pathetic self-styled dramas. It's a town where the Tasty Freeze tootsies, Inida Goodwin and Helen Bedd, schlep haute cuisine just across from the Piggly Wiggly.

During two acts and 12 scenes with dizzying costume changes, we pop in for breakfast, watch a hilarious interview for "Intellect" magazine, (a periodical that will never grace Tuna's libraries), sit agog at the insane doings of a strychnine-slinging canine killer whose plans go awry and cruise by the overpass and bemoan how hobos under the bridge are making it so there is nowhere fit to throw your garbage.

We are then enjoined to pick up a cheap used weapon sure to kill something, uncover a funny yet evil act of revenge and commiserate with a perpetually rejected portly teenage cheerleader wannabee. We even take a serious moment for sincere prayer.

Under the true-to-script clever direction of David Lagle, a seasoned Screen Actors Guild and Actors Equity Association member, we watch precision-crafted characterizations by wiry, plastic-faced James Brewer and the "oh-so-comfortable in my own skin" portly Yogi Bearish Richard Ryan crystallize and project the essence of 20 Tuna townsfolk.

We are schooled in the mindset of a book burner, a juvenile delinquent, a cliché-spouting reverend, a pathetic lovable leader of the humane society, a jilted ex-lover of a newly deceased hanging judge found dead in a Dale Evans swimsuit and a Mogen-David wine-sucking fiddler who swears he sees UFOs shaped like chalupah.

Richard Ryan and James Brewer inhabit 20 characters in the two-man play "Greater Tuna."

These are not cardboard characters, as Brewer and Ryan craft townsfolk with depth and aching hearts born of ignorance and easy unwise decisions.

Set, sound and lighting are simple, convincingly well executed and do not distract from the key focus of how Time-headed minds, or lack thereof, work. Costumes and props by Sylvia Gregory, especially considering the split-second changes, are on target, fitting the character and the funny home equally well.

"Greater Tuna" is a consistently theatrical staple.

However, it is more. It is a window to small-mindedness complete with pursed-lipped, vigilante anti-smashers and swaggering self-impressed pseudo sheriffs. Trust me, when you encounter the evil fish eye of Vera Carp, the Tuna patron of pesty and prejudice and chief smut snatcher, well, it'll drop you dead in your tracks.

"Greater Tuna" uses caricatures and humor to point out the foibles and flaws to which we all can fall prey. Furthermore, the many costumes and character changes in "Greater Tuna" remind us that small-mindedness and bigotry is always in our wardrobe. Only the

cut of the cape, the drage of the fabric or the length of the hem change, while the fundamental essence of bigotry and fruits of poor education remain unaltered.

Inarguably funny and entertaining, "Greater Tuna" is at times more of a Great White shark, brandishing razor sharp teeth in jaws of ignorance with single-minded purpose. I urge readers to bring the family and put some of the timeless lessons amaciously showcased in this production into heads and hearts.

Kevin Ryan is a retired railroad, physician, musician and author who lives in Fairfield.



Preview

"Greater Tuna"
Solano Repertory Company
and Benicia Old Town Theatre
Group
Missouri Street Theatre,
1125 Missouri St., Suite 100,
Fairfield - 8 p.m. Fridays and
Saturdays and 4 p.m.
Sundays, through Oct. 21.
422-1598
Benicia Old Town Theatre,
140 West J St., Benicia - 8
p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 4
p.m. Sundays, Oct. 27-Nov.
18. 746-1269
\$15 adults, \$12 students
and seniors on Sundays. \$20
opening night in Benicia.
★★★★

...message sent comically
...Tune! fun in Fairfield
...Richard Rothwell's...
Article Launched: 10/24/2008 08:20:28 AM PST

... message sent comically
... greater Tuna fun in Fairfield
... by Richard Bennett, author of
... (Austin: Laurence, 1984) 200 pp., \$9.95, 24 AM PPT

... Tanya the mission, in the opening scene of "Father on the Road," welcomes us to
... his "late village of Anatolevka in Russia

... The good of boys Thurston Wheelis and Anna Struvie, seated in the OKKO radio
... studio in Tuna, learn of "Greater Tuna," drop good news in our ears, all the
... going on in Tuna. Some of the winning lines of the high school essay
... contest: "Human Rights - Why Bother?" and "The Other Side of Biggles."

... The respective towns, times and circumstances of Tanya and Wheelis and Struvie
... couldn't be any more different, of course, but the plays compare somewhat in their
... gaggle of quirky characters.

... the pig-porn-mindred czar messes with the poor villagers of Anatolevka.
... Tuna, as it has been formerly said, would probably have
... of Did's Used Weapons Shop, 20 oddball deliriums in "Greater Tuna,"
... which is temporarily

The respective towns, times and circumstances with the poor villagers of Anatolia, couldn't be any more different, and of course, but the plays compare and contrast: "Human Fights - Why Suffer?" and "The Good of Toys".

And while the program-minded card masses with the poor villagers of Anatolia, couldn't be any more different, and of course, but the plays compare and contrast: "Human Fights - Why Suffer?" and "The Good of Toys".

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Written in 1982 by Texas actors Joe Sears and Jr. showcases for two actors' skills. And that is what

along with Alabamian Ed Howard, "Greater Tuna" is a makes it a favorite among experienced actors. In the starring by director David Lagle of Benicia. James and Rick Ryan shoulder the jobs of rapidly made character to the backstage dressing rooms from with the help of the costume department. Two days nearly two hours. They pull off the costumes well with drenched eyes and inhabit their characters convincing Texan ways.

As Percy Flisk, Brewer plays the good-hearted dedicated Humane Society employee who feeds ducks, fish and the dogs Ryan's Aunt Pesterson. Flisk is the moral conscience of it all as conscience can't be in Tuna, and, low play, prays to God, for "some help out of it."

who plays Old Snareboy, but who plays Old on the small set who plays Old on the small set

Petty Fisk, Brewer plays the good-hearted and dedicated Humber Society employee who wants to save lives, fash and the dogs Ryan's Aunt Pearl wants to poison. Fisk is the moral conscience of the town, as good as a conscience can be in Tuna, and toward the end of play, says to God, for "some help down here taking care of it."

Brewer also plays Didi Snavely, but Ryan, a big man and a definite presence on the small stage, plays bedeviled husband B. Snavely as well as the Rev. Spikes, who delivers a homily-styled eulogy over the body of the town judge, Ryan, dead in a white suit, like a televangelist, gets funnier with each hackneyed phrase he utters.

Ryan also play Bertha Bumiller, the harried mother of three and a member of Ladies for a Better Tuna. Brewer plays all three of the Bumiller children - the dog-loving

Page 2

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Page 2

Advanced Search

Stanley, a hoodlum in a black leather jacket, Brewer is at the top of his form with a menacing narrative of just how he secretly killed the hard-nosed judge.

Brewer also portrays Vera Carp, a staunch member of the Smut Snatchers of the New Order at the Coweta Baptist Church. Think of Dana Carvey's Church Lady character on 'Saturday Night Live' and you get the idea.

Ryan has the somewhat dubious chore of playing Yippy the dog, a polsy half-Chihuahua, half-rat terrier.

...and town isn't much - as envisioned by set designers Pam Sperring and Paul Zill - and it could be a little more old take is a painted sign here, a few buildings, maybe a water tower, there, painted on the

...over, the old theater axiom seems to prove true: Drama is easy, com

Company and Benicia Old Towne Theatre Group, co

tickets, \$12 to \$15, call 422-1598. It will cost

call 747-1969. Repetier features

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In the end, while watching Ryan and Brewer, the old theater adorn seems to prove true: Drama is easy, comedy is hard. **Tuna**, a co-production by Solano Repertory Company and Bendito Old Towne Theatre Group, continues to Oct. 27 at Forest Theatre, 1125 Missouri St., Fairfield, for tickets, \$12 to \$15, call 422-1595. It will continue Oct. 27 to standing panels that serve as the current backdrop. **Black and Blue**, a play by David Mamet, continues to Oct. 27 at Forest Theatre, 1125 Missouri St., Fairfield, for tickets, \$12 to \$15, call 747-1955. Reporter features writer Richard

Greater Tuna
"Greater Tuna," the latest show offered by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, is now showing at BDES Hall. The play tells the story of the third smallest town in Texas and its quirky inhabitants. The 8 p.m. shows run on the weekends through Nov. 18 at BDES Hall. For ticket info, call 746-1269 or go to www.beniciatowntheatregroup.com.

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The Comedy with "Tex" appeal
Oct. 27 - Nov 18
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
140 West S Street • 746-1269
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Now is your chance to join 20 of the wackiest, most unforgettable characters this side of the Rio Grande in the Benicia Old Town Theatre group's fall production of "GREATER TUNA". Join such local luminaries as Petey Fisk, the SPCA puppy pusher, Bertha Bumiller in her quest to remove ROOTS from the school bookshelves as it "only shows one side of the slavery issue", and Didi Snavley, who sells used weapons which are guaranteed to kill... "If we can't kill, it's immortal!"

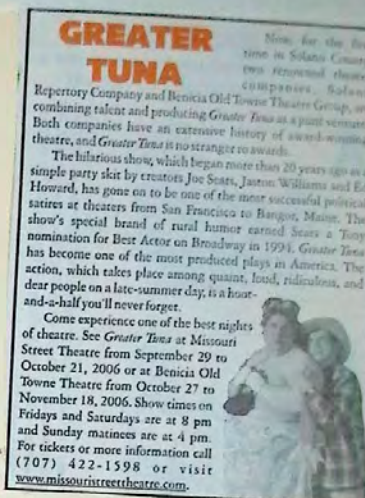
Called a "hilarious and biting intelligent comedy" by Kirsten Lunde of LISTEN and BE HEARD at it's opening at the Missouri Street Theatre in Fairfield, the same two actors will be bringing this mini masterpiece to the Benicia stage beginning on October 27th. Kevin Ryan of the FAIRFIELD DAILY REPUBLIC notes that "Greater Tuna balances biting satire and comedic wit with almost respectful affection." He describes how the actors "craft townsfolk with depth and aching hearts born of ignorance and easy unwise decisions." Do not miss this opportunity for an evening of pure fun, belly laughs, and a satiric look at the small-minded and ignorant.

As a SPECIAL NEW FEATURE for our patrons, we are now offering an hors d'oeuvre plate catered by Java Point on Fridays, November 3rd, 10th, and 17th. For an additional charge of \$15.00 you receive the plate and one drink of your choice with your ticket (advance reservations are required-707 745-4491).

And, won't you consider joining us for the OPENING NIGHT GALA on October 27th? In addition to food catered by the Java Point Cafe and complimentary champagne following the production, we have pre-show entertainment provided by the "VALLEJO PIONEERS" square dancing group (Caller: STEVE MYERS) sure to make you tap your cowboy boots! At \$20.00 per ticket, it's guaranteed to put a smile on your face and make you want more... it will, it will!!!

♦ ♦ ♦
BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP hosts this month's Benicia Chamber of Commerce mixer (10/19). Raffle prizes! Drinks! Entertainment! Great food catered by 2nd Street Grill!





OUT & ABOUT

"Greater Tuna" has Texas charm

SUNDAY, NOV. 5, 2008



Playing now through Nov. 18

"Greater Tuna," the latest show offered by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, is now showing at BDES Hall. The play tells the story of the third smallest town in Texas and its quirky inhabitants. Written by Jason Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard, "Greater Tuna" premiered last weekend and had audiences in stitches. Actors James Brewer and Richard Ryan were offered standing ovations for their portrayals of the colorful

show is sure to please crowds again and again. The play is approximately one hour and 45 minutes with a 15 minute intermission. Drinks and other refreshments are available for purchase. The 8 p.m. shows run on the weekends through Nov. 18 at BDES Hall. For ticket info, call 746-1269 or go to www.beniciatowntheatregroup.com.





SOLANO and **Benicia Old Town Theatre Group**
REPERTORY COMPANY

proudly presents

GREATER TUNA

(The Comedy with
"TEX" appeal)

By Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard

STARRING
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Directed by David Lagle

September 29 - October 21, 2006
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 Fairfield, CA
 For Tickets Call (707) 422-1598

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
 Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
 140 West J. St., Benicia, CA
 For Tickets Call (707) 746-7233
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com



To Home 7:27 pm PT, Wednesday, Nov 1, 2006

Have You Been Tunnaed?

By Carla Gallagher

I had the delight to enjoy "Greater Tuna" at the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP production on Opening night. Oh, what a night it was!

WHO'S ON FIRST
 11-01-06
 By
 Carla Gallagher

HAVE YOU BEEN TUNNAED?

I had the delight to enjoy "Greater Tuna" at the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP production on Opening night. Oh, what a night it was! We were entertained by the VALLEJO PIONEERS SQUARE DANCE CLUB. And then came the play. We laughed and we laughed some more. The set was simple backed by a beautiful work of art. I didn't know out back Texas looked so good. (At least not parts I've seen). JAMES BREWER and RICHARD RYAN did a great job playing all the characters in the play. They kept us laughing with well delivered lines and great timing in their body language and facial expressions. Costuming added to the fun as these two actors went through quick changes backstage. Some of these "got-ups" were worth the price of admission. Benicia local and Director, DAVID LAGLE did a great job on the pacing of the play. The performance was well polished and worth seeing once or twice in the short time it is here. After the performance the VALLEJO PIONEERS got us all line dancing and we were treated to a great Texas style dinner. All together it was a great evening right here in river city. The Play will run Friday and Saturday nights as well as Sunday Afternoon through November 18. Then Tuna will be gone. So be sure to get your tickets early, because when the word gets out this will be a sell out show. Call 746-1269 or go to www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.



Greater Tuna. Benicia Old Town Theatre Group presents this comedy about Texas' third smallest town where the Lone Star Club is too small and Pappy Crane never dies. Features B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia. \$15 adults \$10 students. Info: www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com



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BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP
Proudly Present

GREATER TUNA

(The comedy with "TEX" appeal)
By Jaston Williams, Joe Sears, and Ed Howard

Directed By David Lagle

October 27—November 18, 2006

Inside Benicia

All the world's their stage

Story, review, and photo by TS Owen

A longtime group formed to keep downtown Benicia happy and healthy 41 years ago keeps on going as the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

"The Arsenal was closing and downtown was full of vacant stores and boarded up buildings," said Phyllis Malicki, 73, the last president of the Benicia Old Town Group. "Bob and Maryann Winters were local attorneys on First Street and they put it started in their home."

The idea was to spruce up those boarded up buildings, so the Winters' neighbors in the 300 block of West M Street painted six of them in 1964 as well as empty storefronts. Malicki can't recall what they painted, just that it looked better than the dusty windows and plain boards left in the wake of what many viewed as the Army's desertion. They also proposed ordinances to protect historic buildings and promoted entertainment to enliven the atmosphere.

Malicki moved from Vallejo with her husband Tom and three children in 1956. By 1963, downtown was a "wasteland," she said. They joined the Old Town Group in 1964.

"It was a fun-loving group," she said. "We did more than just paint. The fire department held musters with other fire departments when they raced their antique equipment. We entered the hose cart race. We tied what were then called ladies' 'unmentionables' to our fire hose. I and Barbara Fugate held onto the nozzle end and they ran the cart from where the library is now toward City Park, in fifty-foot sections. As it unrolled, the unmentionables flew. We'd poked holes in the end and the firefighters got soaked when they turned the water on. They loved it and immediately asked us to do it in their towns."

From pants flapping in the breeze to climbing the steeple of St. Paul's Church or hazzarding the steep roof of the Captain Edward Von Pfister home at 280 West J to slap on a new coat of paint, the Old Town Group looked for ways to perk up the town that as yet had no houses in the hills.

"We had horse pasture across the street from us," she said. "There wasn't much beyond downtown. We met once a month in each other's homes to cook up more schemes."

One of their projects was the railroad depot which was sunk in the Bay mud, empty and moldering at the foot of First. With funding from Humble Oil, the group scrubbed and painted it, christened it the Benicia Art Center and opened an art gallery in 1970. In 1971, they restored the 1860 Fischer-Hanlon house next to the State Capitol.

"We did the first coastal clean-up in 1969," she said. "First Street was a mess of tires and rubbish from B Street south. Scavengers had dug deep holes all over looking for bottles. It was dangerous."

As many as 60 belonged to the group in its heyday, she said. They sponsored parks and planted trees.

They attracted 200 to their first dinner theatre in 1964.

"We had traveling theatre groups perform in the IBES Hall. The first one was 'Anniversary Waltz,'" said Malicki, who runs the gift shop for the Benicia Historical Museum. "We even wrote our own, called 'Denny and the Witches.' The antique stores all loaned us the props for it."

Some members wanted to contribute to improvement projects but not entertainment, so the group split amicably in 1973.

"Many of us belonged to both," said the perennial props mistress.

As the city grew, the need for the Old Town Group shrank when other groups took on their tasks, she said. She convened the last meeting in April, 1979, with a dozen members.

The Old Town Theatre Group played on, earning Artys and accolades for its work, putting on at least one play a year and as many as three and continuing the tradition of being fun-loving and forward-thinking.

"This is the first time we have collaborated with another theatre group," said President Dyanne Vojvoda of this fall's production. "It's been fascinating working with another group. For one thing, they pay their people because they can't get volunteers."

"For another, we're very organized."

"Greater Tuna," which ran in San Francisco for seven years, just became available for community theatre, and BOTTG snapped up the rights along with Fairfield's Solano Repertory Company. The two use the same director, David Lagle from Benicia, and actors, James Brewer and Richard Ryan from San Francisco, along with other economics.

The costume changes alone are an economy as both veteran actors switch clothes as quickly as characters, constantly vanishing and reappearing behind a tripartite set. Benician Sylvia Gregory is responsible for the smooth transitions.

"Both of the actors wanted to do the show so badly, the commute didn't



"Greater Tuna" opens with two crazy actors (Richard Ryan and James Brewer) who keep the audience on the edge of their seats in a rainbow of roles.

matter," Vojvoda said from her garage where she was pulling costumes from racks for BOTTG members who played local luminaries buried at the City Cemetery at last month's tour.

She's been part of the group since moving here a quarter of a century ago and was president for five years before her husband took over this year. A retired probation officer, the theatre was a respite for the grim reality of her job. She has attended countless Arts ceremonies to watch the group win, including the gratifying year of 2004 when BOTTG swept the Solano County awards for "Moon over Buffalo."

Challenges include the venue.

"We lose seniors every year who just can't make those stairs anymore," she said.

The stage is not level, making musicals hazardous, and the sound is less than ideal.

"It was built as a dance hall, not a theatre," she said.

"Our patrons started slipping away with the Dean Lescher Center for the Arts opening and the bridge toll hikes, but we keep changing to get them back," she said.

The collaboration is one change, as is the offer to reserve dinner from Java Point Café Friday nights this fall (745-9941) and have it delivered to the theatre. Opening night October 27 will be a big Texas Hootdown. Vojvoda encourages everyone to dig out their ten-gallon hats, don their boots and be ready to hoot and holler at the square dance in the old dance hall. **1B**

BOTTG production

"Greater Tuna" a whale of a play

A hilarious glimpse of a redneck Texas town seen through its radio station OKKK, "Greater Tuna" lassos the audience not just with rapid fire wit but in guessing what in the world the two actors will look like in their next character change.

Written by Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard, Greater Tuna is the quintessentially politically correct play-making fun of everyone: left, right and center.

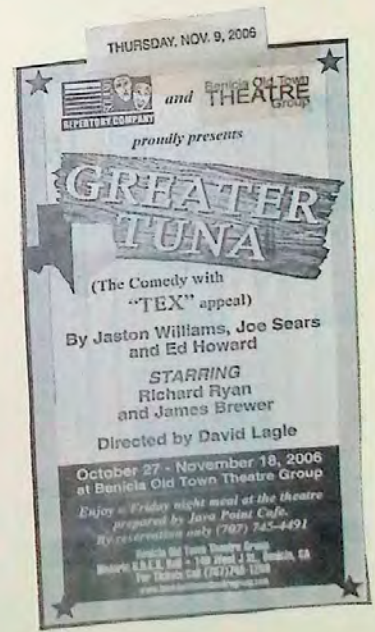
It's easy to call it a grassroots-bashing, left-handed slap at all righteous conservatives—until the humane society man promotes homes for homeless ducks.

This is sly, slick and sizzling humor—if you blink or sneeze you'll miss a zinger. The DJs of station OKKK are as normal as their counterparts in stations across heartland USA, until they transform into their audience, advertisers and families. The fun, once begun, never lets up.

From used guns guaranteed to kill to Unidentified Flying Chalupas to the Piggly Wiggly store and Tazsee Freeze waitress Helen Bed to Smut Snatchers out to ban words and puppy pushers addicting children to pets, nothing is sacred, safe or sane.

Greater Tuna is a Texas-size hoot. It plays weekends in Benicia at the BDES Hall from Oct. 27 to Nov. 18.

Go to www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org or call 746-1269 for information and tickets.



Benicia Old Town
THEATRE Group proudly presents

LEND ME A TENOR



By KEN LUDWIG

April 20 - May 12 directed by
IRV SIEGEL

For Tickets Call
(707) 746-1269

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

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OUT & ABOUT

April 20

LEND ME A TENOR

Now is your chance to enjoy a zany farce about opera, sex, laughter and mistaken identities set in the 30s. Join the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group in their spring production of "Lend Me a Tenor."

Directed by Benician Irv Siegel, the talented and experienced cast includes Benicia's own Dan Clark and Sarah Rozett.

Each show offers a no-host bar with wine, beer and sodas in addition to specialty coffee drinks.

April 22 is opening night with catered food and complimentary champagne following the production. Everyone is invited to come in 30s costumes. Opening night tickets are \$22 per person.

The play is showing at Historic BDES Hall, 140 W. J St. The show runs through May 12 and tickets \$17 general admission, \$15 for seniors and discounts for groups of 10 or more.

Call BOTTG at 746-1269 or go to www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE Group

LEND ME A TENOR



By KEN LUDWIG

SPRING 2007

Ken Ludwig

LEND ME A TENOR

Directed By Irv Siegel

Design	Paul Zill	The Cast	Tito Merelli	Dan Clark
Lighting Design	Rob Woods		Julia	Janet Duhé
Costume Design	Dyanne Vojvoda,		Maggie	Tina Lulsen
	Donna Telepak,		Max	Christopher Mantione
	Carol Berman		Maria	Sarah Rozett
	Trea Devlin-Pruden		Bullhop	Stephen Scott
			Diana	Coleen Walsh
			Saunders	T. Louis Waltz

with the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's own Dan Clark and Sarah Rozett.

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April 2007

Inside Benicia

NEWS • CULTURE • EVENTS • EDUCATION



BOTTG's 43rd Season Ender

Photo & Caption by TS Owen

Janet Duhe and Dan Clark began creating their characters last month for the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's latest production *Lend Me a Tenor* by Ken Ludwig, a fitting follow-up for the wildly funny *Greater Tuna* last fall and BOTTG's first ever production *Anniversary Waltz* in 1964. It's a zany farce about opera, sex, laughter, and mistaken identity set in the 1930s directed by Benicia's Irv Siegel with performances Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. (\$17) and 4 p.m. Sunday matinees (\$15) from April 20 to May 12 at the BDES Hall on West J. For more information, call 746-1269, visit www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com or email info@beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com. **B**

Benicia Old Town Theater Group proudly presents

LEND ME A TENOR

By KEN LUDWIG

April 20 - May 12 directed by IRV SIEGEL

For Tickets Call (707) 746-1269

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Things to Do Places to Go People to See

Free WEEKENDER Magazine

April 2007

Things to Do Places to Go People to See

Free WEEKENDER Magazine

May 2007

Benicia Old Town Theater Group proudly presents

LEND ME A TENOR

By KEN LUDWIG

directed by IRV SIEGEL

Join us Opening Night for Show & Gala April 20 • \$22.00

April 20 - May 12
Fri. & Sat. 8pm - Sun. 4pm
Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street - Benicia

Tickets & Information: (707) 746-1269
or reserve tickets on our new website @ www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Tickets: \$17 General Admission
\$15.00 Seniors (62)/Students
Reserved Seating & Discount: (10 or more)
TICKETS ALSO SOLD AT DOOR

No Host Bar & Decadent desserts sold before show and intermission

This night in September of 1934 is the biggest in the history of the Cleveland Grand Opera Company. The world famous tenor Tito Morelli is to perform Otello, his greatest role at the gala season opener. Through a hilarious series of mishaps he is "Indisposed" but the show must go on!

Times-Herald
Friday, April 13, 2007

THE ARTS

'Lend Me a Tenor' hopes to sing in Benicia

By RICH FREEDMAN

If you go

What: "Lend Me a Tenor" by Ken Ludwig
Where: Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
When: Weekends April 20 through May 6
Where: BDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
Contact: 746-1269 or beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Irv Siegel really wanted to play Saunders in "Lend Me a Tenor," the latest production by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. "I played the role before. It's wonderful," Siegel said. "The problem: There was no director around to cast him."

"I didn't know if they had some wonderful choices and

they were trying to narrow it down or they weren't satisfied with what was out there," Siegel said.

So, being the assertive 61-year-old that he is, "I threw my hat in the ring," Siegel said.

Apparently, the BOTTG board liked the toss. Siegel was out as Saunders and in as director for the play that runs weekends April 20 through May 6 at the BDES Hall.

For the veteran Benicia actor, there's not that much difference being on stage or orchestrating those on stage.

"Even when I'm acting, my main focus is the whole gestalt of it," he said. "When I act, I try to make sure it fits with the style, the time period, the relationship with each other. So it's not that much different than

(See TENOR, B3)



Mike Jory/Times-Herald
ACTORS COLEEN WALSH and Dan Clark rehearse for "Lend Me a Tenor."

Tenor

(From B1)

directing. The difference is the director has to tell other people about his choices. As an actor, I can file them away until I do direct."

As the director, Siegel urges his cast to know the feeling of Depression place in 1934. In "the biggest night in the History of the Cleveland Grand Opera Company," as the log describes the farce. "Even though it is comedy and a farce, I want them to understand the and what was happening," Siegel said. "That people didn't have jobs or if they did, they were probably low paying."

"Lend Me a Tenor" features world-famous Tito Morelli, who is to perform Otello in the gala season opener. Saunders, the general manager, hopes this will do great things for the city.

"The idea is to have an idea where the characters 'come from' before the opening curtain," Siegel said.

The production has to be directed, Siegel said. "So the audience cares about the actor. The audience is more involved in the play. It's not like watching a TV comedy."

Though farces have been described as characters becoming caricatures, Siegel begged to differ. "Nobody is a caricature," he said. "They are funny things. And everything they do feels normal to them. There's normalcies in their character. The bellhop comes in a bellhop suitcases to Tito Morelli."

Siegel said the audience should find "Lend Me a Tenor" worthy of attending "because it's a very funny show and it's got that touch of humanity in it."

BENICIA HERALD

'Tenor' lives up to its billing as 'farcical' and 'confusing'

By Sena Christian
Staff Writer

In the second act of "Lend Me a Tenor," one character asks another if he is out of his mind, to which the man replies: "I'm not so sure." And so explains the tale of mistaken identities and confusion in this delightful comedic farce presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

The play, directed by Benician Irv Siegel, takes awhile to develop but once it does, the plot twists, double entendres and frazzled characters are worth the wait.

Set in 1934 in the elegant suite of a Cleveland hotel, the Tony Award winning play by Ken Ludwig centers on the American debut of Italian tenor Tito Morelli. The tenor, known also for his drinking and philandering ways, is

scheduled to perform the lead in "Otello," for a Cleveland Opera Company fundraising gala.

Before Tito's appearance, we are introduced to Max, played by Christopher Mantione, and an anxious general manager named Saunders, played by T. Louis Weltz. The two men wait in Tito's hotel room for the tenor to arrive, along with Maggie — Saunders' daughter and Max's girlfriend. Maggie, played by Tina Luise, is a young woman in search of a pre-marriage fling. She also happens to harbor a crush on ladies' man Tito.

Saunders makes the renowned tenor Max's responsibility, warning him to stick to the Italian like glue and make sure he doesn't get any liquor or women. What neither of the men figures on,

though, are a justifiably jealous wife, an obstinate husband and plenty of spousal fighting.

When everything starts to unravel in these characters' lives the fun gets going. Wife Maria, played with gusto by Sarah Rozett, finds Maggie hiding in the suite's bedroom closet. All Maggie wants is an autograph but what Maria sees is a husband's impending doom. Maria takes off, leaving behind a letter. Upon finding the note, Tito crumbles with despair.

A tenor threatening suicide, a double dosage of tranquilizers and a general manager's misguided determination that the show must go on set an entertaining comedic chain of events into motion.

The eight actors in "Lend

TENOR

Continued from page A1

Me a Tenor" manage to adjust seamlessly to shifting character roles and play well off one another, especially in the second act.

Mantione is likable as the timid, eager-to-please Max, but when he adopts the persona of Tito, the actor really

finds his groove.

He delivers effective comedic timing as he transitions between the role of an operatic superstar and an aspiring singer whose talent has finally been realized.

From the moment the voluptuous Maria makes her entrance in a bright red satin dress, matching hat and scarlet lips, she steals the stage. Rozett displays the perfect

mixture of wifely devotion, sassiness and funny Italian phrasing to bring her character to life. Each time Maria leaves the stage, you'll wish she would come back.

Benician Dan Clark is hilarious as the confused Tito and Weltz does a great job capturing Saunders' desperation. Maggie is believable as Tito's No. 1 fan, but you can't help but question her charac-

ter's loyalty to her boyfriend. The supporting cast includes a bellhop-hoping-to-meet-the-legendary tenor, an opportunistic opera singer with sex appeal and Julia, the chairwoman of the fundraising committee — whose exaggerated facial expressions and large feather in her cap punctuate every word she speaks with delightful silliness.

If you enter B.D.E.S. Hall

prepared to see a play that delves into some deep philosophical conundrum or explores the contradictions of the human psyche, you'll be disappointed.

If you go into the play hoping to sit back, appreciate the beautiful set and costumes, and immerse yourself in the comedic confusion on stage, you'll leave completely satisfied.

The nonprofit Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has been around since 1964.

"Lend Me a Tenor" runs Friday and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. through May 12 at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J. St. General admission tickets are \$17 and can be purchased at www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com or call (707) 746-1269.

'Lend Me a Tenor' playful, delightful

By PAULA MCCONNELL
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — Benicia Old Town Theatre is a well-known, well-seasoned community theater group that is now in its 43rd season. Located smack dab in the middle of downtown Benicia, it is arguably one of the best kept secrets of the entire Bay Area.

Ken Ludwig's "Lend Me a Tenor," which opened Friday, should certainly be catapulted out of secrecy and touted as one of the best recent bits of local theater.

"Lend Me a Tenor," directed by actor and director Irv Siegel, is a rousing and fun filled night of theater. And it just might be because Siegel has dared to introduce some fabulous, yet not overly familiar faces, to the stage.

"Lend Me a Tenor" is a light-hearted, farcical comedy enshrouded in mistaken identity, lost and found love affairs, lightly laced with myriad double entendres.

Around all of this is just the right blend of intrigue with a titillating stream of sexual humanity that involves several comedies of error.

Much of Ludwig's writing house a general sense of playfulness, inviting the audience to enjoy the moment and not overly philosophize about the experience.

In short, one comes away from this show with a good feeling.

The prime premise offered by the playwright is simple: What would one do if an opera performance is a few hours away and the lead tenor does not show up to perform for lots of misunderstood reasons?

As usual in community-produced theater, some tried and true stock characters appear time and again. However, local theater is at its best when it is accessible to more than just a few.

That said, it is important to note that Siegel has brought that very trademark to this performance. He has managed to introduce some rare, superior talent to the Benicia stage.

Among the new faces and obviously superior voices are Janet Dube, Christopher Mantione, Sarah Rozett, T. Louis Weltz and Tina Luise.

Dube, who is English, adds a sophisticated flair to her role as the opera's gold chairperson. Even though the scene is set in



Dan Clark ("Tito") and Sarah Rozett ("Maria") star in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's "Lend Me a Tenor."

Review

"Lend Me a Tenor"
Benicia Old Town

Theatre
Play runs until May 12.
8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays,
4 p.m. Sundays.

\$17.
Historic B.D.E.S. Hall,
140 West J St., Benicia.
746-1269.
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.

post-depression downtown Cleveland, her accent lends itself to the role.

Sarah Rozett, who was recently seen on stage at the Vallejo Music Theatre, is superior in her role of the forsaken Italian wife of the central character, famed opera star, Tito Morelli. Rozett's manner, Italian accent and overall appearance are extremely believable.

Dan Clark (a Benicia actor) plays her husband as the central character of Tito, the Italian tenor. As usual, Clark is sound and solid.

T. Louis Weltz, who plays the character of Saunders, does impressive work with fetching facial expressions and fine

stage movements. Without a doubt, however, one of the most promising up and coming talents on all Bay Area stages is Christopher Mantione, who plays Max. Mantione has a stellar tenor voice, which the audience hears only fleetingly throughout the show.

If only he were to release his inhibitions and let more of his innate talent shine, the audience would better reward him. With a little bit of encouragement, Mantione could truly soar on stage.

Furthermore, one of the most understated, but magnificent talents on stage in this performance is Stephen "Scotty" Scott who plays a singing bellhop. Apparently, Scott has been missing in action on a twenty-five year sabbatical from Benicia Old Town Theatre.

That is unfortunate because Scott has tremendous ability as an actor, with outstanding stage presence and a superior, hitting tenor voice.

If this role was directed too broadly, it could be an unmissable, indecorous and overacted bit. Fortunately, it works here. Siegel has managed to develop Scott's performance to a perfect pitch. Given his witty style and natural abilities, Scott

could well steal a show sans good direction.

No live theater can ever tout excellence without good sets and significant costumes.

Set designer, Paul Zell, deserves high honors and many kudos for the set design and construction of this show. His talent is comparable with that of professional big-name houses.

The dressing of the set, done by Dyanne Voyvoda, is sterling as well. Also deserving of accolades are the costume designers, Carol Berman, Donna Telepak and Voyvoda. Their efforts produced outstanding effects in recreating a fabulous fantasy of the emerging post-depression period.

Community theater is a work of passion, dedication and commitment. It typically involves hundreds of volunteer hours. All of these ingredients are obvious in this case because "Lend Me a Tenor" is an energetic ensemble effort full of laughs, surprises and delights.

Paula McConnell is a freelance writer living in Vallejo.

Benicia Old Town Theatre proudly presents

LEND ME A TENOR

By KEN LUDWIG

directed by IRV SIEGEL

"A zany farce about opera, sex, laughter and mistaken identity, set in the 1930's."

APRIL 20 - MAY 12
Friday & Saturday 8pm • Sunday 4pm

MAX
PLAYED BY CHRISTOPHER MANTIONE

MAGGIE
PLAYED BY TINA LUISE

SAUNDERS
PLAYED BY TIM WELTZ

TITO
PLAYED BY DAN CLARK

MARIA
PLAYED BY SARAH ROZETT

BELLHOP
PLAYED BY STEPHEN "SCOTTY" SCOTT

DIANA
PLAYED BY COLEEN WALSH

JULIA
PLAYED BY JANET DUBE

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140 WEST J STREET
BENICIA

Visit our website: www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

OBITUARY

Irving N. Siegel

February 28, 1946 - June 24, 2007

Irving Siegel, 61, of Benicia passed away peacefully Sunday at his home following a heroic battle with bile duct cancer. He was born in Boston and had been a Benicia resident for the 13 years.

He was a graduate of University of Massachusetts with a degree in accounting and he earned his masters at JFK University.

In a career spanning nearly 30 years, Irving owned and operated several flight instruction schools in Las Vegas; Daytona, Florida and Hayward, Calif. He also worked as a flight instructor for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona and Japan Airlines in Napa.

Irving was devoted to local community theatre, writing, acting, directing and producing plays all over the northern bay Area. He was the founder of Act Now! of Walnut Creek and a member of Sierra Singers, Jewish Men's Choir, AVSIG and the Mortgage Brokers Association. He was also involved with the Human



Awareness Institute in the Napa Valley. He enjoyed traveling in his RV and was an avid Boston Red Sox fan.

Irving is survived by his wife Victoria of Benicia; stepdaughter Heidi (Gus) Barnes of Los Angeles; brother Michael Siegel of Arizona; sister Dianne (Gary) Abuelo of Rhode Island; in-laws Caroline and Frank Downer of Los Angeles; nieces Christina Abuelo and her husband Bill Capinski and Carolina Abuelo and her husband Jon Leary; grandnephews Benjamin, Theodore and Isaac Capinski.

Funeral services will be held 11 a.m. Tuesday, June 26 at Passalacqua Funeral Chapel, 901 West Second St., Benicia with Rabbi David White officiating. Burial will follow in Benicia Cemetery. Family prefers donations to Hiday Foundation (www.hidaya.org), The Elephant Sanctuary (www.elephants.com), Act Now! Theatre Company (www.actnowtheatre.org) and Elephant Care International (www.elephantcare.org).

Reception following services at the home of Larry, Sheila, Margaret and Diana Reiss, 3550 Calm Breeze Ct., Vallejo, CA.



Courtesy photo
IRV SIEGEL remained upbeat despite his failing health, even wearing an 'I'm Not Dead Yet' button at a local production.

Theater veteran saluted

Irv Siegel died of rare cancer

By RICH FREEDMAN

Times-Herald staff writer

It was 11 years ago, but Carlene Coury can't forget her first meeting with Irv Siegel.

"I saw him in the play '10 Little Indians.' He had such a fabulous presence and his voice was incredible," Coury said.

Eventually, Coury directed Siegel in several community productions.

"As many times as I was around Irv, I never saw him down," Coury said.

Siegel, added Vallejo actress Stacey Loew, "had a tremendous sense of humor.

He was always ready with a joke. Where he got them all, I never knew, but he had a million of them."

It was Siegel's positive attitude, "which was constant and

never wavered," that got him through the cancer which finally claimed the local actor and director June 24, Siegel was 61.

"A 'Celebration of Irv Siegel's' life Sunday at the Benicia Historical Museum gives the community a chance to salute the ARTY award winner.

(See SIEGEL B2)

Siegel

(From B1)

"I always admired his courage in face of what was truly a devastating illness," said Coury, noting that "even after his illness, he rarely showed anything but an upbeat nature and an encouraging spirit. Irv loved to sing and Irv loved people."

Coury last spoke with Siegel two weeks before his death.

"We had such a good talk," she said. "And he was very candid about his illness, yet always optimistic that he would beat the disease."

While Siegel was on the East Coast this past year seeking treated for bile duct cancer, he and Coury exchanged emails.

"Irv loved to keep in touch with everyone," she said. "He brought a sweetness and a tenderness with him wherever he went. He was understanding and generous with his actors and his crew. I, for one, will miss him greatly as so many others will as well. I am thrilled to have known him."

Loew first met Siegel in 2000 while they acted in "Night Watch" by the Mira Theatre Guild.

"We had been friends ever since," Loew said, adding that Siegel knew music as well as theater.

"He knew every composer, lyricist and performer for every song every written or it seemed like he did," Loew said. "I have a vivid memory of Irv singing karaoke in my living room until I threw him and two other friends out at 3 a.m."

Ramona Sampayan met Siegel about 10 years ago when they both worked a Mira production.

"He had a little different way of looking at things," Sampayan said.

"His shows weren't cookie-cutter shows. Whatever he chose to do, he would really put his own imprint on it. Even when he was ill, he was still the same old director I knew."

Siegel's last local efforts were directing "Resistance" for Mira, a play written by Siegel's friend, Richard Goodman.

"Irv had wanted to direct this piece for a long time and when he returned from Boston after seeking medical treatment there, he offered to direct the piece free of charge," Loew said.

"He did a fantastic job," Siegel said.

"I've always enjoyed the theater, but for the first 48 years of my life, it was just as an audience member," Siegel said.

Siegel's late mother was an actress until she was 80.

"My dad never had any interest in it, although my mother got him to appear on-stage in a non-speaking role one time," Siegel said.

Born in Boston and a 13-year Benician, Siegel owned and operated several flight schools in Las Vegas, Daytona, Fla., and Hayward. He also worked as a flight instructor in Napa for Japan Air Lines.

Siegel founded "Act Now!" theater company in Walnut Creek and was a member of Sierra Singers, Jewish Men's Choir, The Pilot's Association, and Mortgage Brokers Association. He was also a big Boston Red Sox fan.

From: Theatre Bay Area <theatrebayarea@theatrebayarea.pmailus.com>
Subject: Funeral for Irv Siegel, Tues June 26
Date: June 25, 2007 1:05:50 PM PDT
To: moesdaddy@earthlink.net

Sent by: Theatre Bay Area

Reply to the sender

Forward to a friend

theatre
BAY AREA

Funeral For Irv Siegel, Tuesday June 26

Dear Theatre Community,

One of our community's most-loved members, actor and director Irv Siegel, died on Sunday.

His friends and family would like the community to know about his funeral, which takes place Tuesday, June 26 at 11AM at Passalacqua Funeral Chapel, 901 W. 2nd Street, Benicia, CA.

[Here is the Google map link.](#) The Chapel phone number is (707) 745-3130.

His friends and family are also planning a celebration of his theatrical life, which will take place in a few weeks. Details are forthcoming.

Theatre Bay Area joins the community in extending our condolences to Mr. Siegel's family and friends.

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Year 2007 Phone (707) 745-5435 email: info@beniciahistoricalmuseum.org website: beniciahistoricalmuseum.org Sep./Oct.

Ten Gun Salute to Dyanne Vojvoda

Our kudos this month go to Dyanne Vojvoda of Benicia Old Time Theater who works tirelessly to promote the theater. In spite of that, Dyanne is generous to a fault in helping us in our efforts to portray historical figures in our activities. Whatever or whoever is needed for an activity, Dyanne consistently provides the appropriate costume - it may be General Vallejo, Robert Semple or just commonplace folks to populate our float for the Twilight Parade. She provides wonderful support for our activities. Thanks, Dyanne, for all you do for us and the Benicia community.



THE DAILY REPUBLIC
AND FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY SERVICES
PRESENT

The Artys

23rd Annual Gala

Celebrating Solano County Theater
Sunday, September 9, 2007 • 6 p.m.

Party reception in the lobby following the awards show.
Catering by Personal Touch by Design.

JULY 1, 2006 TO JUNE 30, 2007

DRAMA Continued

LEAD ACTRESS IN A DRAMA
Sherron Buz-Voldes, "Resistance," MIRA
Sandra Riser, "Resistance," MIRA
Camilla Shreve, "Dead Man Walking," SCT
Camilla Shreve, "The House of Ramon
Iglesias," SCT
Leslie Spitzer, "To Kill a Mockingbird," SRC

DIRECTOR OF A DRAMA
Hector Correa, "The House of Ramon
Iglesias," SCT
Tia Madison, "For Colored Girls ...," HIG
George Margins, "Dead Man Walking," SCT
Barbara Norris, "To Kill a Mockingbird," SRC
Ivy Singel, "Resistance," MIRA

OUTSTANDING DRAMA
"For Colored Girls ...," HIG
"Resistance," MIRA
"Dead Man Walking," SCT
"The House of Ramon Iglesias," SCT
"To Kill a Mockingbird," SRC

COMEDY

SUPPORTING ACTRESS IN A COMEDY
Don Clark, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG
Sara Fierman, "The Underpants," SCT
Fawn Fyning, "Chapter Two," MIRA
Stephan "Scotty" Scott, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG
T. Louis Waltz, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG

SUPPORTING ACTRESS IN A COMEDY
Ivy Ann D'Amato, "Chapter Two," MIRA
Jonas Duke, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG
Cathy Knowles, "Black Deeds ...," MSTG
Sarah E. Rosen, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG
Rachel Guimaraes, "The Underpants," SCT

LEAD ACTRESS IN A COMEDY
James Brewer, "Greater Tuna," SRC/BOTIG
Andrea C. Miller, "The Underpants," SCT
Pamela Run, "Greater Tuna," SRC/BOTIG
Vern Scotland, "The Underpants," SCT

LEAD ACTRESS IN A COMEDY
Tara Lujan, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG
Annie Mustlenbruch, "Black Deeds ...," MSTG
Julia Selt, "The Underpants," SCT
Vicki Zabara, "Chapter Two," MIRA

DIRECTOR OF A COMEDY
Cory Conn, "Chapter Two," MIRA
Mary Camelson-Mustlenbruch, "Black
Deeds ...," MSTG
Joseph Delacruz, "The Underpants," SCT
David Lagle, "Greater Tuna," SRC/BOTIG
Ivy Singel, "Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG

OUTSTANDING COMEDY
"Lead Me a Tender," BOTIG
"Black Deeds ...," MSTG
"Chapter Two," MIRA
"The Underpants," SCT
"Greater Tuna," SRC/BOTIG

MUSICAL
Liz Andrews, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
Staci Arizaga, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
Alyson Blume, "Sophisticated Ladies," VMT
Pamela Laurentzon, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Pamela Laurentzon, "Sleeping Beauty," VMT

SUPPORTING ACTRESS IN A MUSICAL
Donald Abner, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Michael Glynn, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
Robert Pance, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
John Rivard, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
Jared Villarreal, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT

SUPPORTING ACTRESS IN A MUSICAL
Rebecca Cribbin-Cootes, "Fiddler on the
Roof," VMT
Addie Morgrave, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Whitney Mitchell, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Patty Penrod, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
Elizabeth Pickett, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT

LEAD ACTRESS IN A MUSICAL
Seth Michael Anderson, "Bat Boy: The
Musical," SCT
Julia Lopez, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Mark Miller, "The Truth About Cinderella," FCT
Paul Plain, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
Robert Wilson, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT

LEAD ACTRESS IN A MUSICAL
Linda Cribbin-Cootes, "Fiddler on the
Roof," VMT
Barbara McAdams, "Bat Boy: The
Musical," SCT
Kat McAdams, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
Sarah E. Rosen, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Katie Winchell, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
Joseph Anderson, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
Joseph Anderson, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
Johnathan Burton, "The Truth About
Cinderella," FCT
Lana Puklad, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
William Tennant, "Sophisticated Ladies," VMT
William Tennant, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT

DIRECTOR OF A MUSICAL
Alyson Blume, "Sophisticated Ladies," VMT
Pamela Laurentzon, "Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
Pamela Laurentzon, "Sleeping Beauty," VMT
George Margins, "Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
Dyan McBride, "Annie Get Your Gun," SCT

OUTSTANDING MUSICAL
"Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
"Bat Boy: The Musical," SCT
"Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
"Sleeping Beauty," VMT
"Sophisticated Ladies," VMT

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION OF THE SEASON
"Annie Get Your Gun," SCT
"Fiddler on the Roof," VMT
"The House of Ramon Iglesias," SCT
"Resistance," MIRA
"To Kill a Mockingbird," SRC

Legend
BOTIG: Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
FCT: Fairfield Civic Theatre
SCT: Solano College Theatre (Fairfield)
VMT: Vallejo Music Theatre
MIRA: Mira Theatre Guild (Vallejo)
SRC: Solano Repertory Company (Fairfield)
SYT: Solano Youth Theatre (Fairfield)
Headliners: Headliners Studios (Suisun City)
HIG: Harbor Theatrical Group (Fairfield)
MSTG: Missouri Street Theatre Gaslighters (Fairfield)

ARTYS THEME SONG WINNER:
Dahl Williams with his song, "The Artys"

FINAUST:
Robert Jacobs and Jane Hurt
Ruben Oriol Rivera (Mojito)
Christopher Grekenberger
Eddy "K" Koonil

ALTERNATES:
Arthur Stout
the trio of Barbara McAdams and her mother,
Beryl, and Mark Middleton
and Anthony Gray Finecheerio

To hear the winning number and all the other
entries, along with minutes of the composers,
go to www.cityofvallejo.com/cityofvallejo.org
The final, orchestrated version of the winning
song will be aired on KRCB 95.3 FM,
Brendan Television Group, Vallejo Community
Access Television on Channel 27, and Vacaville
and Fairfield Cable Channel 26

THEME SONG CONTEST CREATOR
Kevin Ryan

THEME SONG JUDGES
Joe Anderson
Robert Briggs
Chris Fraw
Helen Infiniti
Moj, Richard Mench
Walt Mickolajic
Jeff Traeger
Walt Walden
Jamie Davis
Greg Enico

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April 2008

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Vol. 14 No. 7 Circulation over 41,000 Mailed • Benicia, Vallejo, American Canyon

Mid-April 2008

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This Burlesque Musical Comedy is an
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SUGAR BABIES

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Sugar Babies is an affectionate
Burlesque Musical Comedy that
pays tribute to the comic spirit of the 1930's.
Come join us for an evening of period
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If you've never been to a BOTG show,
let "Sugar Babies" be the one you start with!

Directed by DAVID LAGLE
Choreographer: Sara Arango
Music Director: Susan Anderson

APRIL 18 • MAY 17, 2008
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Tickets available for "WILL CALL" Online
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or Chamber of Commerce

Weekender Magazine • April 2008 • Page 11

Things to Do Places to Go People to See

WEEKENDER

Free May 2008

Sugar Babies Weekender Review

This B.O.T.G. production takes you on
a nostalgic trip to the days of burlesque,
that irreverent (definitely not for kids) form
of American entertainment. Full of puns and innuendos,
Chorus Girls, tap dancing, and songs from the original
Broadway hit with Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller. This
is fun way to spend a night out in Downtown Benicia!

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Sugar Babies is an affectionate
Burlesque Musical Comedy that
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Directed by DAVID LAGLE
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Through May 17th
TICKETS & INFO: 707-746-1269
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Benicia Old Town
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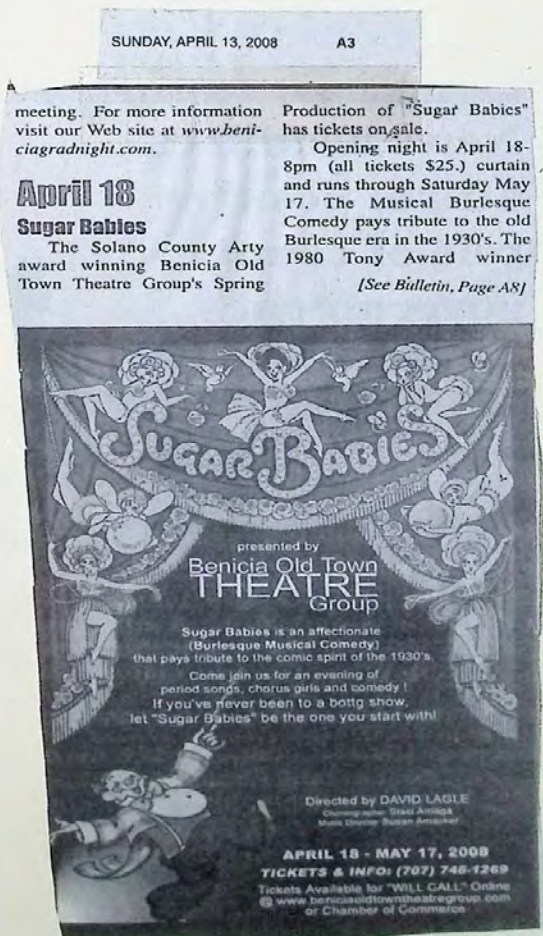
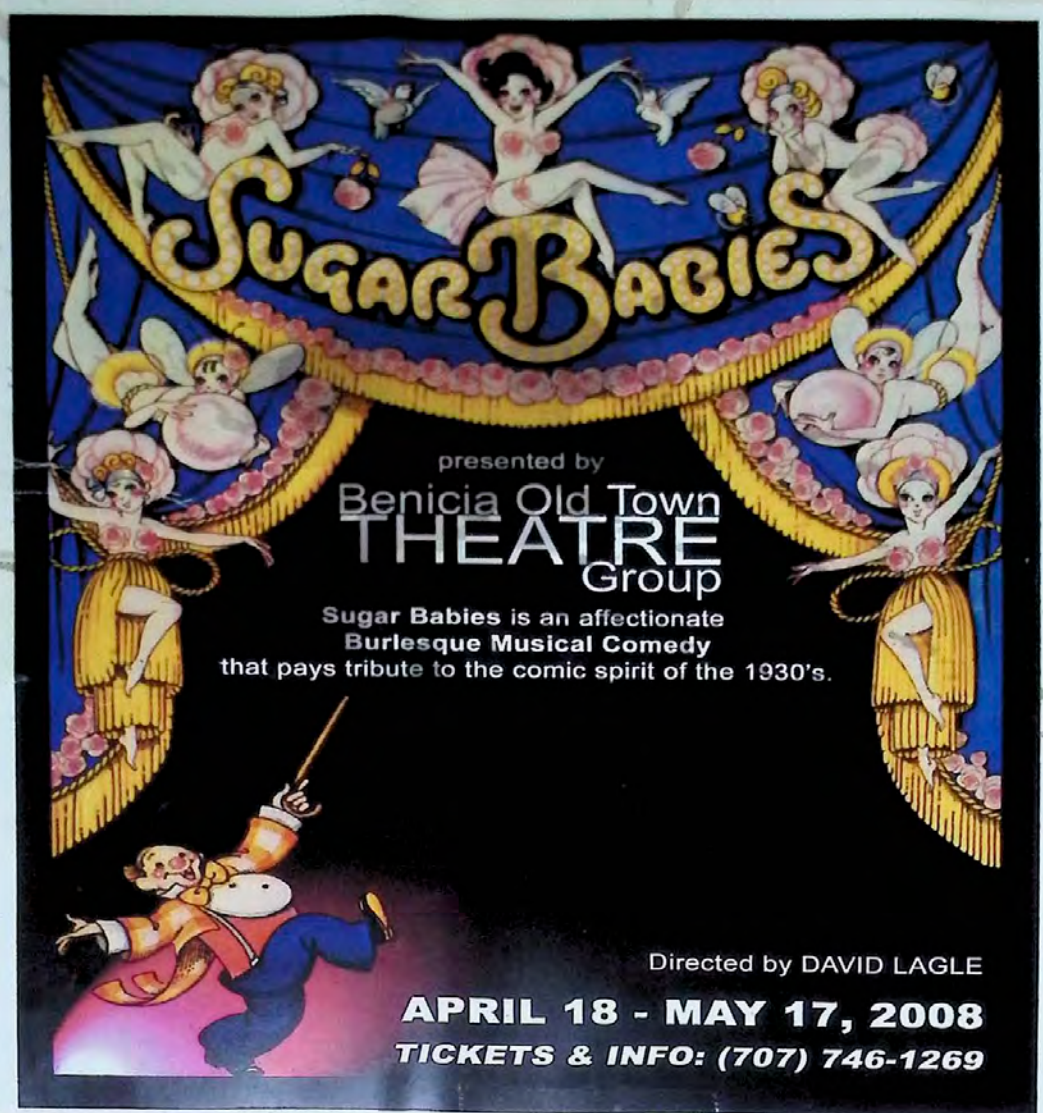
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SUGAR BABIES

The burlesque musical comedy

Opening Night Friday, April 18, all tickets \$25
April 18-May 17-curtain Fri/Sat-8pm, Sun-4pm

General admission: either night \$20, Seniors: \$18
Theatre: B.O.T.G. Hall, 140 West J St.
Advance tickets available at Benicia Chamber of Commerce, 808 First St.
or visit www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com • 707-746-1269



'Lend Me a Tenor' hopes to sing in Benicia

By RICH FREEDMAN
Times-Herald staff writer

If you go

What: "Lend Me a Tenor" by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
When: Weekends April 20 through May 6
Where: BDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
Contact: 748-1289 or beniciatowntheatregroup.com

Irv Siegel really wanted to play Saunders in "Lend Me a Tenor," the latest production by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

"I played the role before. It's wonderful," Siegel said. One problem: There was no director around to cast him.

"I didn't know if they had some wonderful choices and

they were trying to narrow it down or they weren't satisfied with what was out there," Siegel said.

So, being the assertive 61-year-old that he is, "I threw my hat in the ring," Siegel said.

Apparently, the BOTTG board liked the toss. Siegel was out as Saunders and in as director for the play that runs weekends April 20 through May 6 at the BDES Hall.

For the veteran Benicia actor, there's not that much difference being on stage or orchestrating those on stage.

"Even when I'm acting, my main focus is the whole gestalt of it," he said. "When I act, I try to make sure it fits with the style, the time period, the relationship with each other. So it's not that much different than

(See TENOR, B3)



ACTORS COLEEN WALSH and Dan Clark rehearse for 'Lend Me a Tenor.'

Tenor

(From B1)

directing. The difference is the director has to tell other people about his choices. As an actor, I can file them away until I do direct."

As the director, Siegel has had to know the feeling of Depression times since "Tenor" takes place in 1934, in "the biggest night in the history of the Cleveland Grand Opera Company," as the Samuel French play catalog describes the farce.

"Even though it is comedy and a farce, I want them to understand the time period they were in and what was happening," Siegel said. "That people didn't have jobs or if they did, they were probably low paying."

"Lend Me a Tenor" follows world-famous Tito Morelli, who is to perform Otello in the gala season-opener. Saunders, the general manager, hopes this will do great things for the city.

"The idea is to have an idea where the characters 'came from' before the opening curtain," Siegel said.

The production has to be directed, Siegel said, "so the audience cares about the actor. The audience is more involved in the play. It's not like watching a TV comedy."

Though farces have been described as characters becoming caricatures, Siegel begged to differ.

"Nobody is a caricature," he said. "They are real people doing really funny things. And everything they do feels normal to them. There's intricacies in their character. The bellhop comes in singing opera. That's what a bellhop might do if he's delivering suitcases to Tito Morelli."

Siegel said the audience should find "Lend Me a Tenor" worthy of attending "because it's a very funny show and it's got that touch of humanity in it."

BENICIA HERALD

109TH YEAR • No. 115

ONE SECTION, 12 PAGES

ALWAYS 50¢

GOOD MORNING!

TUESDAY

SEPT. 11, 2007

AFTERNOON SUN

Morning clouds give way to afternoon sun. Highs in the low 80s. Winds will be 10 to 20 mph.

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SPORTS A7
COMICS A6

BHS drama, BOTTG split 10 ARTYS



Courtesy photo

Dan Clark and Sarah Rozett in a scene from "Lend Me a Tenor." Clark won best supporting actor for "Tenor."

Jessica York
Staff Writer

This weekend was a boon for local theater, when two groups raked in 10 awards for a county wide theater arts awards ceremony.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and the Benicia High School drama department each secured five awards at Sunday night's 23rd Annual Arty Award ceremony, which compares theater in Solano County.

"I think there is always room for improvement," Benicia High School Theater Administrator Christine Mani said Monday. "That's where the Artys come in... That's one of the things that we can improve. It's some feedback.

There's only so many times you can hear 'you're great' and believe it."

The high school's productions of "Seussical" and "The Mouse that Roared" brought in 10 nominations in nine categories this year. The school's five wins were slightly down from last year's six wins — but with many more competitors for the prizes this time around, Mani said. Though the Arty Awards have been ongoing for more than two decades, the high school category was new to the event last year, and not many schools were involved initially.

Mani said her students were given "a nice little pat on the back" Sunday at the Fairfield Center for Creative Arts when they were asked to per-

form a song selection from "Seussical" as the final interlude of the evening.

"Seussical," which brought together close to 75 participants (including casting, alumni, technicians and live orchestra), won awards for best musical direction (Chris Piazza), best set design (Christine Mani and others), best choreography (Leslie Chapman — BHS alumna), best director (Christine Mani), and best overall production. "The Mouse that Roared," nominated for set design and gathering close to 40 people to put the play together, did not win in its category.

Although the awards named specific people for

See ARTYS, page A2

A2 TUESDAY, SEPT. 11, 2007

ARTYS

Continued from page A1

their involvement, Mani said the plays were group efforts that everyone could take credit for. About 33 students, technicians and alumni went to

Sunday's event together, and even more went on their own, Mani said.

She applauded the art award ceremony for bringing theater together from across the region and allowing students to make connections with professionals.

In future years, Mani said

her group will work on highlighting their set lighting for judges, an area they feel they excel, but have yet to pull in any awards for.

Mani is also hoping to see vocal training and chorus brought back to the school, and to get more parents involved with productions in

the future.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group secured five awards during the ceremony, described as "unbelievable" by Dyanne Vojvoda, Old Town Theatre Group member and past president.

This was Old Town's eighth year participating in the

Arty Awards, and their productions of "Lend Me a Tenor" and "Greater Tuna" grabbed 14 nominations.

The five awards the group took home included best comedy supporting actor for "Lend Me a Tenor" — Dan Clark; two best comedy actors for "Greater Tuna" — James

Brewer and Richard Ryan; best comedy director for "Greater Tuna" — David Lagle and best comedy of the year, "Greater Tuna."

Dyanne Vojvoda of the theatre group did not return phone call for comment.

Contact Jessica York at jessicaybherald@yahoo.com

Local companies sparkle in Arty Awards competition

By RICH FREEDMAN
Times-Herald staff writer

Complete list of winners
Page B6

Fortunately for the Mira Theatre Guild, history didn't repeat itself at last Sunday's annual Arty Awards in Fairfield.

Fact is, production companies not named "Mira," "Vallejo Music Theatre" or "Benicia Old Town Theatre Group" are the ones that typically walk home with a wheelbarrow of trophies.

C.C. Sabathia, the Cleveland Indians' pitcher from Vallejo, couldn't shut out South Solano County production companies more than Arty judges.

"Historically, Solano Community Theater runs away with all the awards," said Stacey Loew. "They have huge

budgets for costumes and set design. They also pay for Equity actors — something smaller companies cannot do."

Yet Mira, with the success of "Resistance" and "Chapter Two," bagged four Artys, while VMT walked away with two and Old Town claimed one individual honor and four shared Artys with the Solano Repertory Company.

"Mira did wonderfully," Loew said. "Though judges supposedly rate each performance individually, I think it's human nature to compare each company

(See AWARDS, B6)

B6

Awards

(From B1)

to one another," Loew said.

VMT was nominated for 26 Artys, but only Lynn Combs' costume design for "Sophisticated Ladies" and Pamela Lourentzos' directing of "Fiddler" were honored.

ARTY AWARD WINNERS

"It's great recognition for a job well done to all of our nominees and winners," said Judith Brown, VMT's executive director.

Though Robert Wilson didn't win Best Actor for his stellar job as Teyye in "Fiddler on the Roof," Brown was proud that he "brought the house down" with his rendition of "If I Were a Rich Man."

"He performed so

well," Brown said. "The crowd went wild."

"A lady saw me after the show and said it was the highlight of the performance that evening," said Wilson, adding that he wasn't disappointed in not getting Best Actor.

"I didn't do the show for myself," he said. "I did it for the cast and VMT. The award would have been nice, but I still feel

that the show was great and have lots of wonderful memories performing with the cast and crew."

Loew won Best Supporting Actress in a drama for her work in "Resistance," while Shemone Buie-Valdes earned Best Lead for the same production.

"Resistance" also won Best Outstanding Drama.

Mira's Vicki Zabarte took home Best Lead

actress in a comedy for "Chapter Two."

Winners for the BOTTG included Dan Clark, the Best Supporting actor in a comedy, "Lend Me a Tenor." The BOTTG and Solano Rep shared efforts in "Greater Tuna," as David Lagle won for Best Director in a comedy, while James Brewer and Richard Ryan split the vote for lead actor for "Tuna," which also won for "Outstanding Comedy."

Actress and director Carlene Coury and Clark paid tribute to the late Irv Siegel, who directed "Resistance" and "Lend Me a Tenor," Siegel, a Benicia resident, died June 24. He was 61.

"It was difficult, but it was also an honor," Coury said, adding that she was "thrilled" that Siegel's efforts were well-received.

"Irv worked very hard and it certainly showed."

through the plays and the actors," Coury said.

Local high schools got into the winner's circle, with Benicia High School taking home the five trophies for "Seussical," including Christine Mani for "Best Design" and "Best Director," Chris Piazza for "Best Musical Direction," Leslie Chapman for "Best Choreography," and the entire show for "Outstanding High School Production."

St. Patrick's St. Vincent was also represented as Jacob Pomeroy was honored for "Best Sound Design" for "Raggy and the Best."

Vallejoian Dale Williams unveiled his new award, "The Arty Theatre Award," that opened the festivities at the Fairfield Center for the Performing Arts.

"It went off as expected," Williams said. "Very successful. The crowd reaction was great."

THE ARTS

Times-Herald
Friday, September 14, 2007

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"It went off as expected," Williams said. "Very successful. The crowd reaction was great."



BOTTG reception

Scott and Christina Strawbridge are hosting a reception for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group at the Old Benicia Library, 144 East G St. at 6-8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 8.

This reception has a two-fold purpose. First, this will be a great way to support BOTTG. Second, haven't you always wondered what the

Old Library looks like inside since it was converted to a residence in 1996?

Tickets are only \$20 each and all proceeds will go to BOTTG.

Call 751-0100 for ticket information, or mail your check (made payable BOTTG) to: Strawbridge, P.O. Box 159, Benicia, CA 94510.

Please contact Scott or Christina Strawbridge if you have any questions.

Scott W. Strawbridge
P.O. Box 159
Benicia, CA 94510

Association Management
(707) 751-0100
Fax (707) 751-0200
Email: swstraw@aol.com

Scott and Christina Strawbridge are hosting a reception for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group at the Old Benicia Library, 144 East G Street, as follows:

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Saturday, September 8th, 2007

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Editor
Benicia Herald
Benicia, Ca.

September 13, 2007

Dear Editor,

As the current president of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, I am writing to publicly thank Scott Strawbridge and his wife Christine for their recent generous support of our organization. They are frequent patrons of our plays, and spontaneously volunteered to host a fundraising evening in their home to benefit our group on September 8th. This wonderful event, replete with food and drink at their expense, resulted in a \$2000. donation to the BOTTG!

Scott is a candidate for a City Council seat this fall. While we at the Theatre Group have a policy of not endorsing any one candidate, his unsolicited generosity toward our non-profit theatre deserves recognition. I urge Benicia voters to consider such an act as surely indicative of Mr. Strawbridge's dedication to the community and its artistic well being. Thanks again, Scott and Christine!!

Dan Clark
1607 Shirley Drive
Benicia
746-5526

BENICIA HERALD

On Memorial Day he thinks of Dec. 7

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

There was a time when Willie Daniels thought he was the only Pearl Harbor survivor living in Benicia. That probably was true until he met Joe Paul, another Benicia resident who was in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Pearl Harbor Story" last night.

It was a chance meeting from Pearl Harbor to Benicia. Daniels, a former World War II aviator, was in Benicia in 1941 when it was still a shipyard. He was in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Pearl Harbor Story" last night.

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Vet

Continued from page A1

was Honolulu. "It was pretty quiet," said Daniels of 1940 Honolulu. "At Waikiki Beach they still had wooden sidewalks and only a couple of hotels."

Daniels was in his bed on the destroyer, MacDonough, when enemy planes began the attack that propelled the United States into World War II.

He had decided to sleep in that morning. It was a Sunday, and he had nothing out of the ordinary planned that day. A general alarm sounded. There was no time even to look for his helmet, and Daniels and the rest of the crew rushed to their stations in skivvies.

Daniels was a gunner's mate on the MacDonough's #5 Gun, the farthest aft. Once the alarm went off, the MacDonough suddenly found itself without power as the tender ship supplying their electricity completely shut down.

"I guess the demand for power was more than they could handle," Daniels said.

Without power to his gun turret, Daniels couldn't move it fast enough to keep up with the attacking planes. One bomb fell just outside the railing near Daniels' station. He watched as it slid into the water.

"When the attack started, there was only one officer on board, an ensign," Daniels recalled. "We took things into our own hands, and I broke the locks on the ammunition lockers without orders from anyone. We just kept firing. I don't know how many rounds."

The MacDonough's luck held true, and soon it was steaming out of Pearl Harbor. At Waipio Point, Daniels recalled, they had to dodge depth charges dropped by the ship in front of them. A midsize submarine had been detected sneaking into the harbor, but again, the MacDonough survived.

In fact, the destroyer — "We called them Tin Can because they were light, fast and had no armor out of proportion to their size," said Daniels — didn't run into trouble until another US Navy ship ran into it in a dense fog near Alaska. The MacDonough, built in 1935, was towed to Mare Island and was repaired and modernized with new weaponry.

Still situated here in his cozy 1948 home on Buena Vista, Daniels is surrounded not only by his many war souvenirs, but also his awards from a grateful

anyone. We just kept firing. I don't know how many rounds."

The MacDonough's luck held true, and soon it was steaming out of Pearl Harbor. At Waipio Point, Daniels recalled, they had to dodge depth charges dropped by the ship in front of them. A midsize submarine had been detected sneaking into the harbor, but again, the MacDonough survived.

In fact, the destroyer — "We called them Tin Can because they were light, fast and had no armor out of proportion to their size," said Daniels — didn't run into trouble until another US Navy ship ran into it in a dense fog near Alaska. The MacDonough, built in 1935, was towed to Mare Island and was repaired and modernized with new weaponry.

Still situated here in his cozy 1948 home on Buena Vista, Daniels is surrounded not only by his many war souvenirs, but also his awards from a grateful

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BENICIA HERALD

BOTTG brings a little SF to Benicia

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Former stand-up comic Dan Scopazzi will probably have a series of flashbacks when he arrives in suburban Benicia Friday night to kick off two weekends of his one-man show, "Outer Mission, Middle Class."

The show is the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's fourth offering of the spring season in its new, busier format. "Outer Mission, Middle Class" revolves

around Scopazzi's experiences growing up in the San Francisco Mission district and his subsequent jitters sojourn into the depths of a suburban bedroom community. He now lives in Foster City.

Scopazzi, the son of Italian immigrants, has been on the road with his one-man production from Half Moon Bay to Benicia, and was originally doing stand-up in clubs with the likes of Robin Williams, Jerry Seinfeld and Jay Leno. He's done TV commercials and industrial emcee jobs, but

finally quit stand-up to sink his teeth into something with more substance.

"It's difficult to discuss the human condition when you've got a bunch of guys doing shots in the front row at the club, who came to heckle the comic," Scopazzi said.

The former Special Education teacher admits that he'd rather do something more than talk about sex and dating. Instead, he cracks jokes about the suburban life of the Costco generation, who, says Scopazzi, act as if they're shopping

can heritage, even while working it for laughs. Mostly, though, Scopazzi is just very funny.

"Outer Mission, Middle Class" will appear for two weekends only, May 8 through 17. May 8, 9 and 15 are 8 p.m. cocktail shows, tickets are \$12. Mother's Day, May 10, features a mom's brunch at noon, with showtime at 1 p.m., tickets are \$25 with catering by Antoinette's Cucina. Sunday, May 17 is a 4 p.m. matinee for \$12.

Call 746-1269 for information and reservations. Tickets will also be sold at the door. All shows will be presented at the BDES Hall, 140 West J Street.



Dan Scopazzi

Limited space at Mills for community groups



Les Mahler/Herald Staff

Contractors are working on the inside of the former Mills School to get it ready for use as a community center.

By Oliver Symonds
Staff Writer

Private organizations hoping to lease a portion of the former Mills Elementary building are in for a not-so-pleasant surprise.

Former president Dyanne Vojvoda of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group sent an application for space eight months ago. She currently rents space from the theatre group from her home and said she would prefer a more formal setting for that side of the business.

Unfortunately for Vojvoda, City Manager Jim Erickson does not believe the new

community center, which is set to open in spring 2008, is seeking for long-term lease applicants. "We're probably going to have a lot of demand from ad hoc programs," he said.

The only dedicated space in the center to a non-city organization is for Boy and Girl Scouts, Erickson said. The city previously held a contract with the scouts at a location across the street from Mills Elementary for \$1 per year.

That location is no longer habitable and the new space in the community center will resume the old agreement. "The contract assured them

they wouldn't be losers in the move," Erickson said, adding that the new location will be a much better space.

The main purpose of the new facility will be to house the headquarters for Benicia's Parks and Community Services Department.

Although no use policies have been set, Erickson expects some space in the center to be reserved for temporary lease, such as wedding receptions and parties. Specific rules have yet to be determined.

"The rest will be used by various city organizations," Erickson said, adding that use policies will probably go

before the City Council prior to the center opening.

The site is still in the early stages of construction. "We've started the preliminary work," Erickson said. "We've tore out material that had decayed or had dry rot. There's asbestos that needs to be removed before we start."

He said the asbestos, underneath the tile flooring, had probably been there a long time. "Probably for 20, 30 years or more."

Although school was in session during the time he estimated asbestos was there, Erickson said it probably did

A2 THURSDAY, AUG. 2, 2007

MILLS

Continued from page A1

n't pose a health risk to the students. "They say it's not a hazard as long as it's not disturbed."

So far the city has invested at least \$600,000 in renovations for the site and expects the total project to cost approximately \$2 million.

"We're still putting it together by bits and pieces," Mayor Steve Messina said. "We've been working on it for

over a year."

The Benicia Unified School District closed Mills Elementary in 2005 in an effort to increase its reserves. In previous years the district had dipped below the state required reserve level. But those figures were based on

former superintendent Kimberley Dennis' numbers. Dennis was later removed as superintendent when an audit proved that the district actually had a surplus instead of a deficit. It cost the district more than \$180,000 to buy out Dennis' contract.

The district has since replenished the state mandated 3-percent reserve.

The city is leasing the site for an annual rate of \$120,000. The two portables used by the elementary school will also be used as a part of the community center.

Although the future looks unrelenting for Vojvoda, she maintains persistence. "We attend every city council," she said. "It would be the answer to our dreams."

Editor Les Mahler contributed to this report.

TOURIST TIMES
October - December 2007
Vol. 18, No. 4
Vallejo Convention & Visitors Bureau Newsletter
Attracting and Serving Visitors for over 20 years!

Calendar of Events

October - December 2007

October
4, 9, 10 Little Nell & The Mortgage Foreclosure. Presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, B. D. E. S. Hall, Benicia. (707) 746-1269

November
19-21, 26-28 Little Nell & The Mortgage Foreclosure. Presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, B. D. E. S. Hall, Benicia. (707) 746-1269



Special General Membership Meeting Information:

Second Tuesdays of each month, open meetings are held at 438 York Drive, Benicia.

Announcements are also posted in the local newspaper.
Information Telephone: 707 746-1269

E-mail:

info@beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

These meetings are open to the general public, all ages are welcome.



Special Sponsorship Program Information:

Your organization or business can help us in many ways! Please consider a financial donation or an in-kind contribution to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. In this way, YOU will be contributing to our continuing efforts to delight the loyal patrons in our local communities with the BEST theatre experience we can provide!

Information Telephone: 707 746-1269; BOTTG President: 707 746-5526

E-mail:

info@beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

BOTTG is a 501(c)(3) Non-profit Charitable Organization and all donations are tax deductible. Thank You!

"LITTLE NELL" and "LITTLE NELL AND THE MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE"

FALL 2007 MELODRAMAS

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group presents:

A NIGHT OF BOTH MELODRAMAS!

Boo the VILLIAN, WILEY WHIPLASH!!

Cheer the HEROINE, NELL PUREHEART!!

OPEN AUDITIONS

up to 5 MEN, up to 7 WOMEN-can double cast (all ages!!)

Call 707 746-5526

Sunday August 19th (1-4pm)

****Monday August 20th (7-9pm)**

****Wednesday August 22 (7-9pm)**

****Historic B.D.E.S. Hall-140 W J St. Benicia**

-4 WEEKEND PERFORMANCES: October 19- November 10-

SPRING 2008 MUSICAL BURLESQUE "SUGAR BABIES" (APR- MAY 2008)

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

**August 19 &
20**

BOTTG auditions

Come one, come all to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's open auditions for an outrageous evening of melodrama with both "Little Nell" and "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure."

All ages, shapes and sizes are welcome and encouraged to audition for the parts, including 5 men and 7 women.

Open auditions are being held on Sunday, August 19 from 1 to 4 p.m. at 601 First St., Ste. 100 and on Monday, August 20 from 7 to 9 p.m. and Wednesday, August 22 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St.

Performances will run for four weekends, Oct. 19 through Nov. 10. For additional information call 746-5526 or go to www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

P.O. Box 602, Benicia, Ca. 94510

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHOWCASE YOUR NEXT PRODUCTION ON OUR STAGE?

We are now interviewing for 10- minute Intermission talent for the current 2007 Fall Production of:
**'LITTLE NELL AND
THE MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE'**
and 'LITTLE NELL'- an evening of melodrama!

If your youth group is interested in performing for our audiences for one entire weekend of performances (Friday/ Saturday nights, and a Sunday matinee), please contact Dyanne Vojvoda at 707 746-5526 or the theatre's website. Our Fall Production opens Friday, October 19 and runs through November 10, 2007.

This may be Community Theatre at its best!

BENICIA HERALD- attn LES and MAYA

Please post this in your BULLETIN BOARD and OUT ON THE TOWN SECTIONS asap

Come one, come all to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's open auditions for an outrageous evening of melodrama with both Little Nell and Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure. All ages, shapes and sizes are welcome and encouraged to audition for the parts, including 5 men and 7 women. Open auditions are being held on Sunday, Aug. 19th (1-4PM) at 601 First St., Suite 100, Benicia, and Monday, Aug. 20, (7-9PM) and Wednesday, Aug. 22 (7-9PM) at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J. St. Benicia. Performances will run for four weekends, Oct. 19 through November 10, 2007. For additional info. call (707) 746-5526.

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Thank you,
Dyanne Vojvoda 746-5526



Benicia Herald
FRIDAY, OCT. 26, 2007

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group proudly presents

Little Nell

and Little Nell

and the Mortgage Foreclosure

by John Donald O'Shea

An evening of melodramas

Boo the Villain, Cheer Little Nell and applaud her Hero!!

Oct. 19 - Nov. 10 directed by **TONI OWEN**

For Tickets Call (707) 746-1269 Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Inside Benicia OCT. 2007



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Proudly Presents

An evening of melodramas

Little Nell

"Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure"
by John Donald O'Shea, &
"Little Nell" by John Nash

Directed by Toni Owen
Opening Night Gala Friday, October 19 at 8pm
Show runs through November 10
For tickets call 746-1269

Boo the villain, cheer Little Nell and applaud her hero!

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street Benicia
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group proudly presents

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and Little Nell

and the Mortgage Foreclosure

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For Tickets Call (707) 746-1269 Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

theatre
BAY AREA

OCTOBER 2007

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Benicia
(707) 746-1269
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure

(John Donald O'Shea)
10/19-11/10
Sugar Babies (The Burlesque Musical)
(Allen, McHugh, Fields, Dubin & Malvin)
4/11-5/17

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group proudly presents

Little Nell

and Little Nell

and the Mortgage Foreclosure

by John Donald O'Shea

An evening of melodramas

Boo the Villain, Cheer Little Nell and applaud her Hero!!

Oct. 19 - Nov. 10, 2007

directed by **TONI OWEN** Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure

by: John Donald O'Shea

Presented by Permission of Theatrefolk Original Playscripts

Directed by: Toni Owen

The Cast

Casey Cleandeed
Nell Purchase
Gideon Byball

Wayne Johnson
Susan Amacker
Marty Nemko

Aunt Nora
Wiley Whiplash
Barbara Sloss
Bill Chessman

Scene One: Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure
Scene Two: Little Nell and the Virtuous Villain
Scene Three: Little Nell and Virtue Revisited

"Tween Acts Olio" - 15 Minutes

"A Bird in a Gilded Cage"
Piano by Marty Nemko
Song by Susan Amacker

"The Bowery"
Piano by Marty Nemko
Tap dance by Susan Amacker

Little Nell by: John Nash

Presented by Permission of Eldridge Plays and Musicals

Directed by: Toni Owen

The Cast

Ma Wilkins
Pa Wilkins
Little Nell Wilkins

Susan Amacker
Wayne Johnson
Barbara Sloss

Hector Skyscraper
Carlton Bainbridge
Prompter/Stage Mgr Terri Giner

A Burlesque Melodrama
Mortgage, Tears and Everything!

October

10/13 The Jokers of Ace Comedy Series 8pm
Featuring Paula Poundstone
Benefits Benicia High School PTSA
BHS Haley Horn Auditorium 771-0140

10/13 "Tribute to the Youth" BPAF Concert Series 7pm
Hear talented young regional musicians
Clocktower, 1169 Washington Street
For more information call 553-6111

10/19-11/10 Benicia Old Town Theatre Group Opening Night Gala 8pm
An Evening of Melodramas, Directed by Toni Owen
Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure & Little Nell
B.D.E.S. Hall 140 West J Street 746-1269

From: BOTTG <beniciaoldtowntheatregroup@mac.com>
Subject: review
Date: October 30, 2007 7:45:57 PM PDT
To: Dan Clark <moesdaddy@earthlink.net>

By
Gala Gallagher

Here's wishing you a safe and fun Halloween. Drivers, please take care and be on the lookout for over excited trick or treaters who might not see you.

Wednesday, October 31 kids in costume are welcomed to Trick or Treat the merchants at the SOUTHAMPTON SHOPPING CENTER from 4:00 PM through 6:00 PM.

If you haven't seen the melodramas being presented by the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP put it on your "A" list. If you do, you will have an enjoyable evening. You start out with a sing-a-long followed by two Melodramas. These melodramas have a few "updates" that will keep you laughing. The first villain was well done from the narcissistic Wiley Whiplash played by BILL CHESMAN to Cackles Skyscraper (played by MARTY NEMKO) who played the role of the cast added to the almost constant laughter. Thanks to Director, T. OWEN who put this delightful presentation together in 10 days after several cast changes due to unforeseen circumstances. There was a late change to the melodramas of old as added with some handpicked between the two plays but BOTTG gave us the feeling of the old time shows by supplying popcorn for the audience to thrive. In the old days sometimes, and eggs were thrown at the actors much more than I was expecting. The play will be performed Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons through November 10. Tickets are available at the door. For more info call 746-1269.

BENICIA HERALD

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group

proudly presents

Little Nell

by John Nash

and

Little Nell

and the Mortgage Foreclosure

by John Donald O'shea

An evening of melodramas

Boo the Villain, Cheer Little Nell and applaud her Hero!

Oct. 19 - Nov. 10, 2007

directed by
TONI OWEN

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St., Benicia

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Old-fashioned melodramas on tap this weekend

Caitlin Esch
Staff Writer

10/8/07

If you find yourself longing for the days when melodramas ruled the stage, the Old Town Theatre Group might have the play for you. The group is performing two one-act plays that debut this weekend.

The plays "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" and "Little Nell," directed by Benicia resident Tony Owen, are a pair of melodramas, or pairmelas, as Owen calls them.

"Traditional melodramas are hard to find," Owen said. "When you're watching 'Grey's Anatomy' or Star Wars, you're watching melodrama, but (the plays to be performed this weekend) are different."

Dyanne Vosvoda, active member of the Old Town Theatre Group, said the play is good for those who want to



Courtesy OTTG

Wiley Wiplash, played by Bill Chessman, and Little Nell, played by Susan Amacker, star in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's melodrama "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure."

get out and laugh.

"You can cheer the hero and hiss the villain," she said. Owen agreed. "This is the type of play where you can shout and throw popcorn at the stage. It's very interactive and great for kids."

Owen described "Little

Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" as a modern-melodrama complete with a sexual harassment suit. The second play, "Little Nell," is a parody on melodrama and is performed as a play within a play. Although this weekend's plays are her first with the Old

Town Theatre Group, Owen is no stranger to the stage. In Canada, Owen directed and acted in comedies, and professes her love of melodrama dates back many years. She said the "Little Nell" sequence is unique and has not been performed in this area.

Local actor Susan Amacker plays Nell in "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure." Amacker has been doing community theatre on and off since college, where she studied musical theatre and drama. Amacker has taken part in many a melodrama, playing the villainess and heroine.

"The over-the-top exaggeration is so much fun," said Amacker. "And I love to interact with the audience."

Barbara Mason-Sloss of Benicia plays Nell in "Little Nell." Mason-Sloss starred in plays while attending Benicia High School 20 years ago, and

See NELL, page A2

NELL

Continued from page A1

was looking to get back into acting when she auditioned for "Little Nell."

"I was expecting to get a minor part, but then they cast me as Little Nell," recalled Mason-Sloss. "This is my first melodrama. Well, except for the melodrama called life."

Mason-Sloss said acting in a melodrama is unlike anything else.

"It's totally crazy; it's like being in a cartoon. It will be interesting to see how the audience reacts."

The Old Town Theatre Group has performed more than 83 plays in 43 years. Forged in 1964 by a handful of Benicia residents, the group is now composed of volun-

teers. All levels of skill and experience are welcome at the nonprofit community theatre group.

"We are a volunteer organization with a strong and continuous community presence," said Vosvoda.

The group is not without renown. At the Solano County Arts Awards, the Old Town Theatre Group walked away with five ARTY awards.

The "Little Nell" sequence opens this Friday night at the B.D.E.S. Hall at 140 West J St. Weekend performances will continue through Nov. 10. Tickets for evening performances cost \$17, while matinees cost \$15. For more information, visit the Old Town Theatre Group's Web site at www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com or call 746-1269.

Little Nell's last gasp this weekend

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group bids adieu to a pair of melodramas this weekend with just two shows left in its month-long 44th season opener.

Laughter has reigned at the BDES Hall on West J

Street as the twin shows "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" by John Donald O'Shea and "Little Nell" by John Nash have kept up the comedic traditions of booing the villain, cheering the hero

See NELL, A3



Hero Hector Skystreper (Bill Chessman) fells evil villain Carlton Bainbridge (Marty Nemko), saving Little Nell (Barbara Sloss) from a Fate Worse than Death in the second of two merry melodramas winding up this weekend at the BDES Hall on West J Street.

NELL

Continued from page A1

and saving the heroine from a Fate Worse than Death for nearly a month.

But all things must end, and audiences have thoroughly enjoyed the twin treats of eating popcorn and tossing it at the pair of villains, Bill Chessman and Marty Nemko. Director Tom Owen's six cast members all have dual roles, which gives the actors full rein to show their talents. The Nells at Susan Amacker and Barbara Sloss. Hero Wayne

Johnson and stage manager Terri Ginet round out the roster.

Final performances this Friday and Saturday are at 8 p.m., but there is a full half hour of music and singalong hosted by Nemko, a talented piano player, who also performs between acts with Amacker singing and dancing and an occasional bumbling juggling act by Owen.

"It's been a barrel of fun, and the audiences have really enjoyed themselves," said Owen. Tickets are \$17 at the door. Call 746-1269 for more information.

Oct-Nov 2007

CHAMBER MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

- Gaia Napa Valley Hotel & Spa, 3600 Broadway St. (Hwy 29) in American Canyon, has been certified with a "Gold" rating by the U.S. Green Building Council, the nation's leading accrediting body for environmentally sustainable buildings, making it the world's only hotel to achieve this coveted rating.
- Celebrating 10 years in business, Bob Tothrow and Marilyn Stevens of Floors on First, invite you to stop by and see the newest innovations in flooring at their recently remodeled showroom at 736 First Street.
- Ann Burlingrud—State Farm Insurance, is celebrating 25 years in business. Call Ann at 746-0350 for all your insurance needs.
- Be Chic, 309 First Street, has a new phone number - 745-1148. Claudia invites you to stop by the boutique for the latest fashions and accessories, including imports from Europe and South America.
- Benicia Old Town Theatre Group recently received five awards from the Solano County Theatre Arts Awards (the Artsy) for its productions of "Land Me a Tender" and "Greater Tuna." The group's upcoming production of "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" runs Oct 19 through Nov 10. Call 746-1269 or reserve your seats on-line at www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.
- Pilgrim Home and Hearth, 6440 Goodyear Road, Benicia, manufacturer of fireplace screens, tool sets, and accessory home products, was recently featured in the Costco Connection Magazine. Redecorate your hearth for the coming winter and holiday season from Costco.com and Pilgrim.
- Solano Community College celebrated the opening of its Vallejo Center campus at 545 Columbus Parkway. You can support the college by buying a brick with your name on it for the plaza, www.bricksonus.com/order/sec.
- During reconstruction, all Benicia Big O Tire services (745-0244) will be honored at its Martinez location. Big O will pay your bridge toll or provide free shuttle service to and from the Martinez store.

Times Herald
Friday, November 2, 2007

THE ARTS

'Little Nell' gets taste of 21st century villainy

By RICH FREEDMAN
Times Herald staff writer

Sure, the villain — or hero, really — could have worn a lip ring and tattoo. But even the creative Toni Owen had limits to the contemporary version of the old-fashioned melodrama she created in "Little Nell" and "Mortgage Foreclosure."

IF YOU GO:

What: "Little Nell" and "Mortgage Foreclosure"
Who: Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, directed by Toni Owen
When: Tonight, Saturday, Sunday and Nov. 9-10
Where: B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
Info: 746-1269

The two one-act plays are being staged through Nov. 10 by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. "Both are modern melodramas," the director said. "The roots are the old melodramas — you get to boo and hiss and throw popcorn — but we also talk about prenuptial agreements and sexual harassment."

"Little Nell," written by John Nash, and "Mortgage Foreclosure," by John Donald O'Shea, feature Wayne Johnson, Barbara Sloss, Bill Chessman, Terri Gliner, Marty Nemko and Susan Amaker.

It's a cast that Owen, a former journalist, is proud of.

"They've done a fantastic job, and they keep getting better," said Owen, who has dealt with several obstacles in avoiding a dud in doing things right.

"We've had drop-outs where the part wasn't big enough," Owen said. "And serious illness. So I've had this cast for only 19 rehearsals. But they listen to me, and I like them. It's really been a great



Courtesy photo

WILEY WHIPLASH, played by Bill Chessman, gets a grip on Little Nell Pureheart, played by Susan Amaker, in "Mortgage Foreclosure."

Amaker has enjoyed her part in the production and praised Owen, who has not directed a production since her time in Canada years ago.

"She's a very collaborative, flexible,

Little Nell

(From B1)

easy-going kind of director," Amaker said. "She lets us explore characters before making an ultimate decision. And she worked hard at getting all the actors to bond and trust each other."

Basically, it's about Owen's lifelong fondness for melodramas. "I had two small boys in Banff and, for a ski holiday, there was a melodrama I took them to," Owen said. "And they loved it."

Both children eventually acted, and today they follow the theater, Owen said.

"I love melodramas," she said. "I think it's a great thing for kids to get into, a great way to get them into theater. It's interaction. They get to throw popcorn at the villain."

While the director's enjoyed "Little Nell," it's taken some actors time to adjust, Owen said.

"Not all actors can do or want to or even try to do melodramas," she said. "They like to be behind that 'fourth wall.' A couple of actors (for 'Little Nell') had never done it before. You are not just acting. You're acting in the audience. They're yelling and cheering. It's fun."

Dr. Marty Nemko, who splits time between Napa and Oakland, took over the villain role of Carlton Bainbridge in the original bad guy resigned.

"I accepted the opportunity to 'save the day.' Isn't that what happens in melodramas?" said Nemko, who also plays piano.

"Little Nell" is the more traditional melodrama, Owen said, while "Mortgage Foreclosure" is more of a parody of a melodrama.

"It's a play within a play," she

said of "Mortgage," adding that "actors enter in wrong places and forget their lines. It's a lot more physical. They are alike but couldn't be more different."

Melodramas are ideal for a director "because you're given so much freedom," Owen said.

It's merely coincidence that the title — "Mortgage Foreclosure" — comes at a time when the Bay Area is hit hard by foreclosures.

"Every melodrama has the same plot: Good guy, bad guy, heroine," Owen said. "It's about the deed to the ranch or deed to the mansion or the farm. He owes money. So he's going into foreclosure. How appropriate for these times?"

Owen doesn't know if the local real estate community has come out for the production, which opened Oct. 19 at the B.D.E.S. Hall.

But then, she noted, "we do have fewer real estate people these days."

BHS drama department, Old Town Theatre up for ARTYS

Jessica York
Staff Writer

Two theater groups in Benicia received multiple arts award nominations for an upcoming awards banquet.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and Benicia High School drama department have each had two productions nominated in various categories for the 23rd Annual Artys Award.

According to its Web site, www.theartys.com, "what began in 1983 as an 'in-paper' recognition of outstanding artistic achievement has grown into a 'red carpet' multi-media ceremony, complete with etched glass awards, performances from nominated shows and an 'Arty Party' champagne reception following the show."

The Artys will be held at the Fairfield Center for Creative Arts, 1035 W. Texas St., Sept. 9, at 6 p.m.

Dyanne Vojvoda, former president of Old Town Theatre Group, said the group

ARTYS

Continued from page A1

was very excited about the upcoming black tie gala event in September.

"We're pretty ongoing winners, depending on our shows, of course," Vojvoda said. "We've been participating for about eight years."

Vojvoda said it can be a difficult task to win over the

five volunteer judges who view the shows and make their recommendations, especially when Old Town's productions are placed side-by-side with well-funded organizations.

"In the past, we've been a little disgruntled that we didn't have enough Artys judges come to our show," Vojvoda said. "It's pretty stiff competition. It's changed over time."

About three years ago,

when the group produced "Lost in Yonkers," Vojvoda was not so dubious about how the group would hold up, after they had, "what they call a sweep" in the various major categories, she said.

More important than winning or losing the annual awards, Vojvoda said, is the act of supporting the local arts.

"We do frequent other companies, because it's really

important to keep the arts alive in Solano County," said Vojvoda, whose husband Dan Clark is the current Old Town president. "Win, draw or lose, it's a nice evening of theater."

In the high school theater nomination, Benicia High's "Seussical the Musical" is up for best ensemble cast, director, set design, costume design, lighting design, musical direction, sound design, choreography and overall pro-

duction. Their "Mouse that Roared" is also nominated for best set design.

Old Town's "Lend Me a Tenor" has received bids for best lighting design, three male supporting actor spots, female lead actor, two female supporting actors, director and overall.

Their "Greater Tuna" is up for best male lead with two of their actors, director and overall.

March

Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group

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SUGAR BABIES

The burlesque musical comedy

Opening Night Friday, April 18, all tickets \$25
April 18-May 17-curtain Fri/Sat-8pm, Sun-4pm

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From: Patty Amacker <amacker@sfvalleypublic.net>
 Subject: Little Nell review
 Date: November 7, 2007 2:38:04 PM PST
 To: montecarlo@earthlink.net

Hi Dyanne,
 Here's the review. The writer was actually Tony Wade and this ran on Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007.
 Patty

LITTLE NELL'S REVIEW

Evidently because of the notorious taunting visiting teams receive from local fans, at Oakland Raider home games they now have a little blurb which comes on the Jumbotron and urges fans to "root responsibly because we all have love of the game in common." Unfortunately this is usually flashed on the screen right when the opposing team is running en masse onto the field to a cacophonous chorus of boos, taunts and insults.

Now imagine a scenario where booing is not only tolerated but encouraged and even expected (well, in certain places). Such was the case at the opening gala of "Little Nell" and "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" at the Benicia Old Town Theater on October 19th.

The pair of melodramas was the first ever put on by the 43-year old troupe and featured a protagonist to empathize with, a hero to cheer for and a villain to boo. Signs were held up at appropriate times to illicit specific responses from the crowd and popcorn was even provided to munch or throw at the villain.

Benicia's 100-year old B.D.E.S. Hall is a wonderful place to see a show. The carpeted staircase leading to the upstairs theatre had a musty yet not unpleasant odor and the period architecture helped create the illusion of being transported back in time. Walking into the hall, Marty Nemko was tickling the ivory and singing 19th century songs like "California, Here I Come" and "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home." He encouraged the audience to sing along using lyric sheets provided on the tables.

The invitation to actively participate in the show through vocal and physical means was accepted and in fact we ran with it. I was reminded of when I would go to a theater as a child in Virginia where the audience was overwhelmingly black (it was the '70s so we weren't African-Americans yet) and we shouted at the screen when someone did something stupid. Going to the movies was a lively, interactive event. Unlike characters on the silver

screen however, the Benicia actors could and did react to the audience.

The first play "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" was definitely superior to the second. Susan Amacker was great as the Stepford Wife-like Little Nell Pureheart. She played it for laughs by exaggerating every gesture and her comic timing was impeccable.

Bill Chessman as Wiley Whiplash (who appeared to be a 3-D version of the Dudley Do-Right villain Snidely Whiplash) was the stereotypical bad guy and had the requisite black cape, handlebar mustache and top hat. He'd often break the fourth wall and make funny sidebar comments directly to the audience.

Barbara Mason-Sloss was delightful as Aunt Nora and endeared herself to the audience by being the only character with common sense. Wayne Johnson as Casey Cleandeed was the hero and did a nice job.

Marty Nemko did triple duty by playing mood appropriate background piano music (like Darth Vader's "Imperial March" when Whiplash would enter), holding up audience reaction cards and playing a farmer as well.

Right before the intermission, there was a "Tween Acts Olio" which featured three mini acts: a song by Amacker, a rather embarrassingly unentertaining faux juggler, and a tap dance by Amacker which highlighted both her hooper creds and her gams in a revealing half dress.

The second one act play "Little Nell" suffered by comparison with the first. It was announced as a parody of a melodrama, but it really came across as an overlong retelling of the first story albeit not quite as good. It was like watching a classic episode of "Happy Days" and then following it with "Joanie Loves Chachi." While there were three scenes, nothing much really happened. Plus there was a whole voiceover thing with the script prompter/stage manager which was more tiresome than funny. Still, overall the historic venue was a perfect place for the melodramas and provided a feast of family fun.

★ ★ 1/2 (out of four)

Remed Tony Wade at remed@beniciatheatregroup.com

REVIEW
 "Little Nell" & "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure"
 at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
 140 West J Street, Benicia
 INFO: 707 746-1269

From: BOTTG <beniciaoldtowntheatregroup@mac.com>
 Subject: LISTEN AND BE HEARD REVIEW
 Date: November 7, 2007 5:57:06 PM PST
 To: Dan Clark <mrsedaddy@earthlink.net>, TS Owen <T42LAUGHS@GMAIL.COM>

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An Ingenue and a Pimping Mother in Benicia
 by maria virebel

Attending Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's (BOTTG) production of two one-act comedies, "Little Nell" by John Nash, and "Little Nell and the Mortgage Foreclosure" by John Donald O'Shea, I was entertained by both the company's trickling mad-cap humor and that evening's audience. The production stands as an ideal excuse to gather a group of friends for an evening of inexpensive entertainment. The audience is prompted by cue cards to either boo, hiss, or cheer the villains and heroes. The theatre provides popcorn to throw at the villain. It is a divine riot stirred by the cast, parodying the old fashioned silent movies.

Both acts feature the ingenue, wholesome maiden in distress, Nell, always pursued by the evil intentions of a villain in black cape, handle bar mustache, and a black hat. She is rescued by the wholesome boy next door, or the "Dudley Do Right" type. The actors perform different roles in the production. The ingenue in the first act becomes the pimping mother in the second act. The villain in the first act plays the hero in the second act. It is a treat to witness how each actor changes from play to play. The whole ensemble shares their sense of fun and enjoyment with the audience.

The theatre is arranged like an old time cabaret with tables and chairs. KGO talk show host, Marty Nemko, welcomes the audience with music of the silent movie era. Lyrics are provided on the tables as he leads everyone on piano. For the first play, Nemko as Gideon Byball, the "hayseed" piano player, dons baggie overalls and a straw hat. His Carolina drawl is comical. In the second act, Nemko transforms into the villain, Carlton Bainbridge. As the audience heckles his villainous role, Nemko takes advantage of the moment. Even as his fake mustache accidentally goes half off, he appropriately alludes to the mishap, which leaves the thunderous audience more in an uproar.

Bill Chessman, a physically and vocally skilled actor, gives likability to his villainous character of Wiley Whiplash. Yet, his wonderful stage voice fittingly adorns the heroic character of Hector Skyscraper in the second play. Instead of playing for the laughs, Chessman lends candid expressions and physicality, much like the late film star, Peter Sellers.

Susan Amacker stars as Nell in the first play, and then as the mother willing to sell her daughter off to the villain in the second play. Amacker charms the audience as she adds physical nuances to her roles. Her singing is not missed, either.

Barbara Sloss, an Interior Designer by day, appears comfortable in her role as the clever Aunt Nora in the first play. In the second play, she performs the role of Nell with melodramatic exaggeration, which aptly suits the production.

Wayne Jonson as the nerdy hero, Casey Cleandeed, in the first play, and as the grandpa figure in the second play, exhibits his grasp of character work on stage.

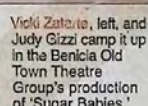
The comedy was touched up with the fine work of costumer Donna Telepak. The gingham dress of both Nells, the suspenders of the men, the plaid suits, black capes, and wigs sprinkle some extra humorous flavor to the show.

The production brought back memories of my high school days of viewing the "Rocky Horror Picture Show." But, BOTTG's evening is more light hearted, innocent, and cozy. The performance space has much character as well. I enjoyed the small bar room where one can enjoy excellent coffee for a mere dollar, or with Kahlua for a few more dollars. The bathrooms are very quaint as well. BOTTG is a gem to be discovered by more in the Benicia community. Its production is suitable for all ages.

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com
 707-746-5526

Friday and Saturday Night Performances:
 Performances begin at 8:00 p.m. General Admission Ticket: \$17.00, Seniors- \$15.
 Senior Sunday Performances:
 Performances begin at 4:00 p.m.





Bringing back burlesque

'Sugar Babies' carries hopes of sweet success

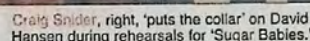
There's going to be some cussing. Some rough language. And adult situations.

No, it's not a city of Vallejo budget meeting. It's "Sugar Babies," the burlesque musical comedy, opening April 18 by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

And the production that opened as a Broadway show with Mickey Rooney in 1979, is just what director David Lagle wanted on his theatrical plate.

"There's some really, really funny stuff here," said Eagle. "I still laugh seeing some of this."

The BOTTG, apparently, featured "Sugar Babies" a decade or so ago, said Lagle, and hopes to repeat its success at the downtown B.D.E.S. Hall.



What: 'Sugar Babies' by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
When: April 18-May 17
Where: B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
Admission: \$20, seniors \$18

There are a few jokes Lagle tweaked, he said.

"Not to make them more contemporary, but to make it funny," he said. "We'll change a little bit. Some of the references made sense at the time, but there wasn't that much of changing other than a couple of spots here and there."

With comedy, the director said, it's all about chemistry.

"It's so important to get the cast relaxed with each other and know each other," Lagle said. "You always work better off somebody who you know. When they become more relaxed and comfortable with each other, you can tell the timing is a little sharper. They're

Lugle's last work was in "Greater Tuna," an Arty-winning effort in a collaborative effort between the ROTTG and the Missouri Street Theatre in Fairfield.

Though Eagle hasn't acted for "six or seven years," he said a potential casting dilemma with "Sugar Babies" may thrust him into a minor role.

"I guess we'll find out," he said.

Lagle said he'll also find out how many local people turn out for "Sugar Babies." With transportation costs rising every year, it's getting tougher to attract tourists.

"I remember when I was doing theater in the '80s and going, 'In 10 years from now, is theater going to be around

And it still is. That's the amazing part. Even though we've gone through this technology age of video games and

age of video games and movies, theater still stays around. It's a good thing."

"Casting-wise, we didn't have a huge amount of numbers. But we really lucked out with the cast we got," Lagle said.

There are certainly challenges for Susan Amacker, the music director and vocal coach.

"I was able to find a drummer and pianist, but the other musicians were harder to come by," Amacker said. "So we found a company that

Also, she added, the original production is more than three hours

and the RVTG wanted to keep it under \$50, "which required a lot of very careful cutting," Amador said.

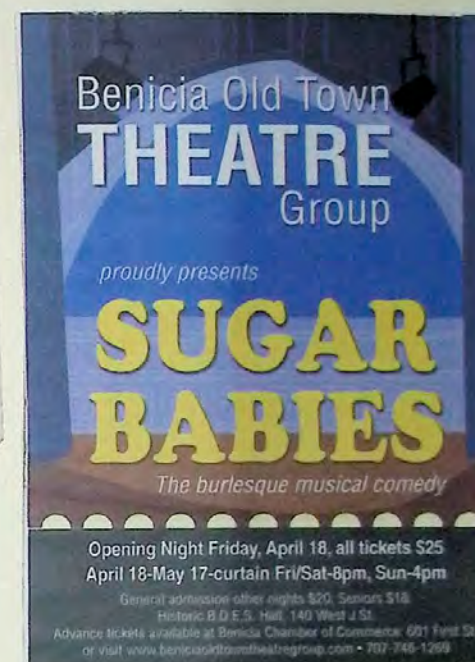
It didn't help that Ammerer is also in the

about three times the stress. Instead of focusing on my part, I had to make vocal decisions for the entire ensemble in order to give the best sound possible."

"The show is so much fun because the comedy is hilarious," she said. "We have several actors

who could have been professional comedians had they chosen that profession. Sometimes all they have to do is look at the audience.

look at the audience and the audience will crack up. The skits come from a more innocent era, but they're still hilarious."



April 18 will be the opening night for the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP presentation of "Sugar Babies" at the BDES HALL. This is actually a revival of sorts as the BOTTG originally performed this show 20 years ago.

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WHO'S ON FIRST
(As seen on BeniciaNews.com and Listen&BeHeard.net)

SUGAR BABIES , TROUBADOURS. AND OPENING DAY

By
Carla Gallagher

April 16 will be the opening night for the **BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP** presentation of "Sugar Babies" at the **BDE3 HALL**. This is actually a revival of sorts as the **BOTTG** originally performed this show 20 years ago. Done in the old Vaudeville and burlesque style, this will be an evening of laughter and music. True to the genre there will be some language and adult themes. This production is the opening of the **BOTTG's 44th** season. Tickets for the Opening Gala are \$25. General Admission is \$20. Seniors \$18. Tickets at the door or at the **BENICIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**. Discounts are available for groups of 10 or more so bring friends and family.

For more info call 746-1269.

[illegible]

BENICIA HERALD

110th Year • No. 268 • Insert: Team Superstore, Three Bros. Furniture

Friday, April 18, 2008

Two Sections, 16 Pages • Always 50¢

SUGAR BABIES HIT THE BOARDS...



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAITLIN ESCH Herald Staff

HOT CHAUB: "Sugar Babies," a popular burlesque comedy, opens tonight. The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production features 14 local actors. Performances run weekends through May 17.

Benicia burlesque

New local production is decidedly fun—and possibly PG-13

By CAITLIN ESCH
Herald Staff Writer

Bawdy burlesque debuts in Benicia tonight.



The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group presents "Sugar Babies," a musical comedy, directed by Benicia resident David Lagle.

The group's spring performance opens this evening with a champagne gala, followed by a steady stream of weekend shows through May 17.

"It's a fast-paced, funny, high-energy show," said Lagle. "Audience members are in for a ride."

Fourteen local amateur actors

participate in the performance. Some have been involved with theatre for decades, while others had never stepped foot on a stage before auditioning.

"It's a great ensemble cast," said Lagle.

Lagle has directed two productions for the BOITG prior to "Sugar Babies." "Over the River and Through the Woods," marked Lagle's debut, followed by last year's "Greater Tuna," which swept house in the Solano County Theatre Arts Awards. The production stole best comedy of the year, best director, and two best actor awards.

"Lagle is a very talented director and actor," remarked BOITG past president and longtime board member Dyanne Vojvoda. "We've all put our heart and souls into this."

The production marks Lagle's last dalliance with theatre. The director has plans to retire from the stage in May to work full time in the corporate world.

"This is my swan song," reflected Lagle. "After 15 years

[See Sugar, Page B5]



April 18

Sugar Babies

The Solano County Art award winning Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's Spring Production of "Sugar Babies" has tickets on sale.

Opening night is April 18-8pm (all tickets \$25.) curtain and runs through Saturday May 17. The Musical Burlesque Comedy pays tribute to the old Burlesque era in the 1930's. The 1980 Tony Award winner starred Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller. It showcases slightly raunchy comedy skits, lavish costumes, and lovely chorus girls. General Admission is \$20. for all evenings except the opening night champagne gala. The Group proudly performs at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall- 140 West J St., Benicia. Business phone: 707 746-1269.

You may reserve WILL CALL Tickets online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatre-group.com

(Groups of 10 or more have reserved seating).

Tickets are also available for purchase at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce- 601 First St., Benicia. If you have not seen a Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production, let "Sugar Babies" be your first!

From: BOITG <beniciatheatre@mac.com>
Subject: review
Date: April 23, 2008 9:19:16 AM PDT
To: Dyanne Vojvoda <beniciatheatre@mac.com>
1 Attachment, 2.1 MB

ENTERTAINMENT

Jokes mostly fall flat in 'Sugar Babies'

By TONY WARD
Daily Republic Staff Writer

BENICIA — Everyone who is a fan of "American Idol" knows what a little Paula Abdul is when assessing the performance of singing hopefuls.

One of her ways to avoid giving negative criticism of even a dramatically bad performance is to compliment a contestant's appearance. So following Paula's lead I have to say that the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Sugar Babies" is... well, it looked very nice Saturday evening.

I've been fortunate in the past two years I have been reviewing plays for the Daily Republic in that up until now I have never had to pass a local show. Now, many reviewers get a perverse thrill out of completely trashing theatrical productions but I do not.

I expect artistic reviewers who help keep the arts alive for the community by expressing their creativity. It requires dedication and many hours of slaving away at the keyboard to write a bad review.

I have no axe to grind (and I'm not a hack) and in fact it is especially hard for me to write this review as I truly enjoy the nostalgic feel I get attending shows at the historic B.D.E.S. Hall.

The throwback theater with its wooden floors and old-fashioned architecture creates a wonderfully delightful experience. On top of that, they reserve a table for me (I asked the little girl who escorted my wife and I



Cost members of "Sugar Babies" pose in this photo. The play will be performed at the B.D.E.S. Hall in Benicia through May 17.

to our table to leave the "reserved" sign there because it made me feel important), provide popcorn and drinks, and make sure of the other theatergoers in this area. When reviewers are happy, reviewers are happy. I have to be honest. The show was just not very entertaining. The first line out with the cast or crew who did the absolute best they could with the weak source material.

While the original production with Ann Miller and Mickey Rooney may have been a serious laugh in the day, it isn't and very well. I mean, it was basically a bunch of silly sketches presented by juvenile sex jokes with a few songs and some dancing by women dressed like they were in a Mickey Club video

thrown in. The sketches were flimsy and the very funny Daisy Morgan's mugging and howling at the very end of the show was a disaster of mediocre one-liners.

I should mention that when I go to see a play or movie, I usually want to know as little as possible about it and just let it unfold and immerse myself in it. I did know "Sugar Babies" was a "burlesque" show and that didn't bring my 10-year-old daughter.

Evidently some of the theatergoers didn't get the humor and thought their four little kids who sat right up front.

That pre-pubescent eyes and faces were taking in the bawdy spectacle wasn't for a child just made the whole thing even less funny. To be sure, I'm not a

prude, but I guess perhaps I'm just not the target audience. When I was a teenager I thought the funniest of the movie "Porky" was the funniest thing I ever saw.

At 44, anatomical jokes only elicit yawns and groans. And it wasn't just me either.

While there were a few chuckles throughout the night, I don't remember hearing any belly laughs — just awkward breaking up the awkward silence or unpolished groans.

Look, I won't say don't see "Sugar Babies" and I will say I started to chuck my stomach about 15 minutes in, couldn't help but think about how much I'd spent on gas I burned driving to Benicia, and regretted not staying home and watching "The X-Files."

Frankly, I'd just get from Hollywood Video. Benicia Herald freelance writer Tony Ward at tonyward@earthlink.net



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Times-Herald
Friday, August 22, 2008

THE ARTS

VMT snags 25 Arty nods

Mira, BOTTG, also in
the mix at annual awards

By RICH FREEDMAN
Times-Herald staff writer

There are winners. And there are losers. But the Arty Awards are more than who takes home a trophy for work done in Solano County community theater.

"It's a chance to get all dolled up and schmooze and that's right up my alley," said Stacey Loew, board president of the Mira Theatre Guild. OK, so there wasn't champagne at least year's event.

"But the food was a vast improvement," Loew said.

And this year, nominations for Mira were easy to swallow. The

Vallejo non-profit received 10, complementing the Vallejo Music Theatre's 25 and the Benicia Old Town Theatre's four. Winners are announced Sept. 7 at the 24th annual

honor fest at the Fairfield Center for Creative Arts.

"I always have a great time at the Arty Awards and I think the event is well planned," said Loew, praising organizers who quickened the pace last year, particularly when the winner was a no-show.

"Hearing dozens of acceptance thank yous from friends and colleagues of the winners just drags the show down and who cares if it's not the person winning?" Loew said.

Judith Brown, the VMT's executive director, was thrilled that the organization garnered 25 nominations.

"I think it's wonderful to get the recognition for the work we do," Brown said.

(See ARTYS, B2)



DAN MORGAN'S Benicia Old Town Theatre performance was worthy of an Arty nomination.

Arty's (From B1)

Brown hopes the trunk load of nominees equals several Arty's. Last year, Lynn Combs received the lone VMT award.

"I would like to see better educated judges; people who are trained directors, actors, designers," Brown said. "I think with their knowledge and backgrounds they could better judge the different aspects of theater."

All of the Benicia Old Town Theatre nominations came for "Sugar Babies," which pleased board member Dyanne

Vojoda. "We're happy to be nominated. We absolutely deserve them and we will be in attendance," said Vojoda, agreeing with

Loew that the program can become eternal. There are 42 categories, including 18 for high school and youth theaters.

"It has become heavy weighted with high school and youth companies," Vojoda said. "I know theater members no longer willing to attend the ceremony because of too numerous categories for youth theater. I agree with the suggestion of having the ceremony separated into two evenings."

Vojoda would like to see the individual nominees limited from its current five to three.

"I believe the judges want everyone to feel recognized, but the nominations should be kept to

only three in each category," Vojoda said. "It would certainly speed up the event."

Vojoda said if anyone at BOTTG deserves the Arty, it's "Dan Morgan, Dan Morgan and Dan Morgan" for his "Sugar Babies" performance.

"Without any question," Vojoda said. "We are fortunate to have many talented local performers return to us frequently, but there is no finer talent to grace our stage than him. We love him and treasure the time he spends with our theater company."

Brown praised the work of Barbara Pond and the five runs in the ensemble cast of "Meshuggah-Numb."

At Mira, Loew believes Kenn Stevens' effort in "Society Security" was "brilliant."

He is always committed to every role he takes on, but this was, by far, my most favorite Kenn Stevens' role," Loew said.

"He was charming and he was delightful, a complete reversal from the usual despicable characters he plays."

Loew said it's "always a thrill" to win an Arty. "not that I have a history of them."

Loew did win an Arty for best supporting actress in a drama last year "and I received numerous kudos" at her next audition.

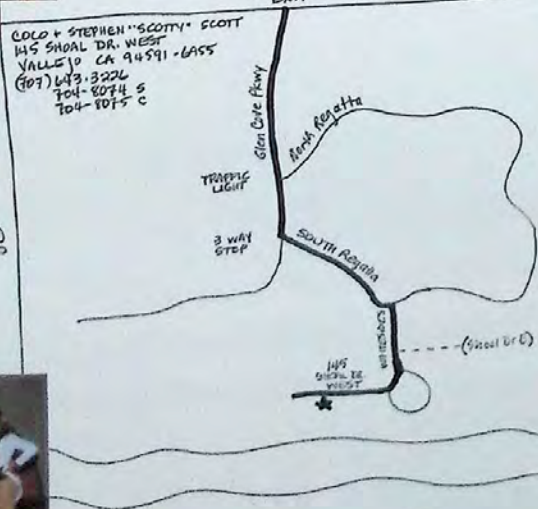
"And my phone rang off the wall the following morning," Loew said. "I think all the wins help Mira."



Sugar Babies Cast Party Friday 05/16/2008 After the Show



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The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTTG)
will have some of their members in period
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The City Cemetery is located just off East 2nd St.
Take Riverhill Rd. (across from McDonald's) and
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FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 707-745-1822



Spirited performances

Benicia Herald
Oct 7-2008



MEMBERS OF THE Benicia Old Town Theatre Group portrayed past residents of the city on Saturday during a flag-dedication ceremony at City Cemetery. Above, Jeremy Clark as James Ewing, a wealthy shopkeeper; top, Dan Clark as Alfred Dalton, a British-born prominent citizen; and below, Kay Hlavka as Mary Hamilton, housekeeper for the well-known Mitner family. Behind Hlavka is Larry Miller as Jack London.



AUDITIONS

BOTTOMS UP!

The comedic action takes place on the caribbean island at the Hotel Pequena



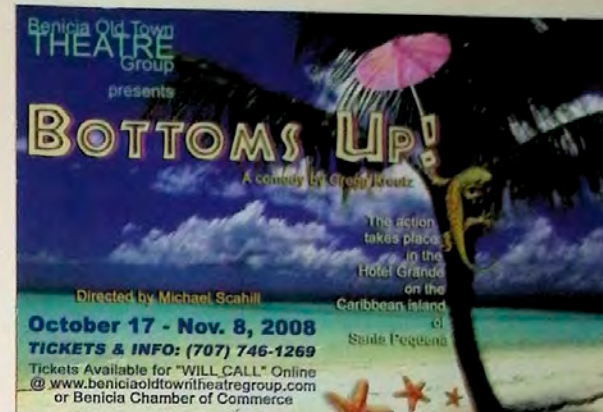
SUN AUG 17 (12-4) 601 1st ST

MON AUG 18 (7-9) BDES

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

Performances 10/17-11/8

beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com



Things to Do Places to Go People to See

Free **WEEKENDER** Magazine
September 2008

Things to Do Places to Go People to See

Free **WEEKENDER** Magazine
October 2008

Benicia Old Town Theatre Announces AUDITIONS for Bottoms Up!

By: Greg Kreutz
Directed by Michael Scabill

The comedic action takes place on the Caribbean Island of Santa Pequena at the Hotel Grande.

Character Breakdown:

JUNE: 20s. Aerobics instructor. Pretty, bursting with energy, a cock-eyed optimist.
VICTORIA: 30s to 40s. Very attractive, Sexy by nature and design. Former Adult Film star.
SENORA: Anywhere from 25 to 50. A diva. Indeterminate nationality, accent. Might even be a man (or just played by one).
EDDY, THE PORTER: 20s to 30s. Young, handsome, completely amoral, decidedly larcenous.
SMITH: 20s to 40s. A wannabe wiseguy with delusions of competence. Probably still lives in his mother's basement.
TONY SCOPE: 30s to 50s. Dreams of becoming the "Tony Soprano" of Cleveland. Will probably find fulfillment as a licensed exterminator.
GEORGE RUSHMORE: 30s to late 50s. Shameless self promoter, always looking for the next score, perpetually broke, inept director of adult films looking for the big break.
KEITH: teens to early 20s. Perpetually stoned cameraman and probably the only sane person in the bunch.
PUMPHREY: 30 to 40. The quintessential nerd. Clueless, oblivious, nervous, judgmental, clumsy.

Audition Info:

Sunday, August 17, 12-4pm at 601 1st Street
Monday, August 18, 7-9pm 140 W. J Street

Please be prepared to read from the script

Call backs: Tuesday, August 19 7pm-9pm

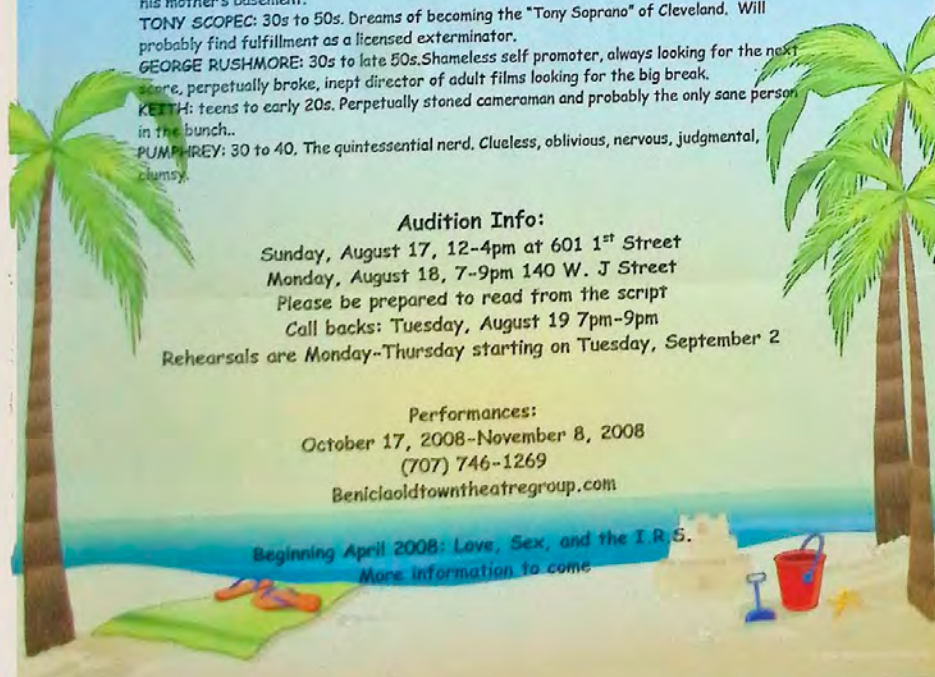
Rehearsals are Monday-Thursday starting on Tuesday, September 2

Performances:

October 17, 2008-November 8, 2008
(707) 746-1269

beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Beginning April 2008: Love, Sex, and the I.R.S.
More information to come



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group Presents **Bottoms Up!**

A COMEDY BY GREGG KREUTZ

Friday October 17th through
Saturday November 8th

Fridays & Saturdays 8PM
Sundays 4PM

\$20 Adults, \$18 Seniors
Opening night, \$25--all tickets

The comedic action takes place on the Caribbean Island of Santa Pequena at the Hotel Grande.
Director: Michael Scabill, Assistant Director: Rachel Obrecht

For more information call 707-746-1269 or go to
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com (for will-call or groups.)

Oct 16-2008
New play from Benicia Theater Group opens Friday
The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group on Friday presents its 44th season with the comedy "BOTTOMS UP!"
The action in the play takes place on the Caribbean island of Santa Pequena at the Hotel Grande.
The director is Michael Scabill. The cast includes Camille Metz, Sarah Roney, Linda Perry, Daniel Morgan, Dan Clark, Phil Obrecht and Sam West.
The show runs weekends: 6 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and 4 p.m. on Sunday.
General admission is \$20.
Performances will be held at Historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J.

Friday, October 24th
"Bottoms Up." 8pm. The action takes place on the Caribbean island of Santa Pequena at the Hotel Grande. The director is Michael Scabill. Performances will be held at Historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J. Tickets: \$20. Info: 707-746-1269 or www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

BENICIA HERALD

Thespian troupe rehearses farcical fall offering



THE CAST OF "Sugar Babies," the spring production of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, directed by Michael Seahill. Seahill also directs BOTTOMS' new play, "Bottoms Up!" that opens Oct. 17.

Benicia theater group celebrates 44th season with new play, 'Bottoms Up!' to open in October

By YVONNE SVEDOLIK
Staff Reporter

What if everything that can possibly go wrong in a money-laundering operation does?

What happens when an unaccomplished gangster's cash-filled suitcase gets accidentally switched with luggage of an attractive but naive acrobatics instructor from Cleveland who is about to be duped into starring in an adult film by a man who thinks she is a pros-

titute? What if all this happens in a run-down hotel on an obscure Caribbean island run by a manipulative and judgmental woman who entertains herself by full involvement in intrigues among her customers?

An opportunity to witness the unfolding of a scenario that brings together a mix of characters who have very little in common will present itself next month, when the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group opens its 44th season with a presentation of Gregg Kreutz' "Bottoms Up!"

"It's a light farce," said Michael Seahill of the play he's directing. "Who's got the money? Who's got the suitcase? The only thing that's missing is mistaken

[See Bottoms, Page A2]

BOTTOMS

(Continued from Page A1)

identity. In this case, you've got people lying about their identities." June -- the services instructor -- has not been roughed up by life enough to see anything but its sunny side. As far as she's concerned, Seahill said, the rather shabby Hotel Grande is a tropical paradise.

As soon as June arrives, her bags get switched with those of Scopec, her fellow Cleveland, a self-proclaimed big kahuna of the underworld on a mission to launder money earned by his less-than-legitimate bookie business.

"He's not nearly as smart as he thinks he is," Dan Clark, who plays Scopec, said of the crook who is in denial about his small-time status. "He controls 13 percent of a bookie operation on the eastern shore of Lake Erie. He's got control issues so he's always flying off the handle."

Scopec routinely takes his frustrations out on Smith, who doubles as his right-hand man and senegont.

"Anything that can go wrong does and I screw it all up, even though I'm not trying to," Sean West, who plays Smith, said of his character.

The show takes the viewers through a constantly accelerating sequence of ironic encounters, mix-ups and who-dun-its.

Dyanne Vojvoda, who has been involved with the group for 28 years, said there was no shortage of pandemonium in the farce.

The troupe has spent four nights per week rehearsing the comedy that boasts a cast of nine -- six men and three women.

Seahill said one of the big

"(Pace) is the prime need in the production. You start at 90 miles an hour and it just has to get faster."

— MICHAEL SEAHILL
DIRECTOR, BOTTOMS UP!

directing challenges for "Bottoms Up!" was building up momentum in a play that begins at a fast pace.

"It's the prime need in the production," the director said. "You start at 90 miles an hour and it just has to get faster."

Sarah Rozett, who plays hotel owner Senora Valdez, said she appreciated Seahill's efforts to liven up the script. "He's taking a lot of liberties with the script," she said.

As example, she cites the entrance of a hotel porter that in the original script was unremarkable.

In Seahill's version, the porter's character is introduced to the audience handcuffed to a bedpost.

"He takes a very plain entrance to something else," Rozett said. "We're very lucky to have such an open-minded thinker as a director."

This will be Rozett's third season with the group. She started out with Ken Ludwig's "Lend Me a Tenor" and sang and acted in Ralph Allen and Harry Rigby's musical comedy "Sugar Babies" during the spring season.

To add to the strange mix of Hotel Grande customers, Kreutz threw in Raymond Pumphrey, played by Pinole's Dan Morgan.

"He's a chemistry teacher

from Scranton, Pa., and he's forced to go there because the school sends all their faculty to these remote countries where high-tech is a toilet that flushes," Morgan said of Pumphrey.

When the teacher arrives at the hotel, Valdez turns him away because he is not handsome enough. Pumphrey goes away and reappears toward the end of the play, begging for a room. He eventually ends up sharing one with June, whom he met when he first arrived.

Morgan, who had the lead role in the group's production of "Sugar Babies" in the spring, said the play required a lot of physical comedy skills, which was not especially challenging for him, since he is a comedian who uses facial expressions and body language to make people laugh. Morgan has been doing stand-up comedy for about 30 years.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's choice of plays is limited by the size of the stage in the B.D.E.S. Hall at 140 West J St., Vojvoda said. "Bottoms Up!" appeared compatible with the space they had.

"We wanted a comedy," she said about the selection process for the play. "We wanted something that would be a six- or eight-person cast. A one-set show."

"Bottoms Up!" opens with a champagne gala Oct. 17. It will run every Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Sundays until Nov. 8.

Tickets are available online at <http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatre-group.com> or at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce at 601 First St.

Tickets for the opening night gala are \$25. All following shows are \$20. Tickets for seniors (62 or older) and students are \$18.



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group presents

BOTTOMS UP!

by GREGG KREUTZ

Directed by Michael Seahill
Assistant Director: Rachel Coleman

The action takes place in the Hotel Grande on the Caribbean island of Santa Poquena

October 17 - Nov. 8, 2008

TICKETS & INFO: (707) 746-1268

Friday & Saturday 8pm
Sunday 4pm

All Opening Night Tickets, Oct. 17 \$25
General admission \$20, seniors/students \$18

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street, Benicia

Tickets Available for "WILL CALL" Online
@ www.beniciaoldtowntheatre-group.com
or Benicia Chamber of Commerce

Circulation: 14,000
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November 2008

AS Wednesday, October 22, 2008 THE REPUBLIC

ENTERTAINMENT

'Bottoms Up!' a frolicking good time

Fast-paced BOTTG production filled with good performances

By PAULA MCCONNELL
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

'Bottoms Up,' a raucous, fast-paced comedy by Gregg Kreutz, opened last weekend at the Benicia Old Town Theatre in historic downtown Benicia.

It is a well-done piece with outstanding theatrical panache. The story is set in a tired hotel on a remote Caribbean island. Several guests of different backgrounds conjoin for a fun-filled night of spicy interludes, social misunderstandings and mistaken identities reminiscent of French farces from past centuries.

Director Michael Schill and assistant director Rachel Obrestad hit one out of the park with excellent casting and flawless stage blocking. Their comedic timing and full use of the stage is superior.

It is refreshing to see many new actors on stage in Benicia. It is unfortunate, however, that Schill chose a New York accent for newcomer June Sherwood, who plays the part of hotel guest Cassandra Metz from Ohio. Sherwood is a solid actress with wonderful stage presence, but the accent impeded much of her performance, causing many of her lines to be indistinct.

Although each of the actors performed well, standouts in this show include Daniel Morgan, who plays a



Sean West and Cassandra Metz star in "Bottoms Up!"

chemistry teacher named Raymond Humphrey. Morgan is a great character actor with understated but hilarious expressions and superb believability.

Sarah Rozett, cast as the hotel owner Señora Valdez, had a consistently good Spanish accent, and remained in accent throughout the play. Intermittent or dropped accents can be particularly annoying in community productions.

Josh Clark, who plays a "sticky-fingered" porter, has a relatively small, but highly important part. His body movement and facial gestures are excellent, al-

bait subtle. Indeed, Schill could have used Clark's natural abilities to even greater comedic advantage.

Laina Perry plays the part of a movie star unwilling to do nudity scenes. Perry is a beautiful woman who is well suited for this role. Often she delivered lines upstage; it would be nice if the audience could see her stunning face more frequently. Rachel Obrestad, who plays a movie camera person named Keith, blends an understated comedic touch to the overall mix.

Set designer Paul Zill created a bifurcated stage complete with a simulated

Review

"Bottoms Up!"
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Runs through Nov. 8 at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 4 p.m. Sundays
Historic B.O.E.S. Hall, 140 W. J St., Benicia
\$20 adults, \$18 seniors
746-5526
<http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org>

elevator which proved to be quite effective, although the elevator bell was inconsistent. And costume designer Donna Telepak proved her imaginative talents with a colorful and eclectic wardrobe selection.

Although "Bottoms Up" is a tight bit of a slapstick that allows the viewer to escape the pressures and worries of today's times, it would be interesting if Benicia Old Town Theatre Group were to choose other vehicles that could allow it to use some of the outstanding talents in the Bay Area. That said, however, if you want a frolicking night of theater and do not want to think too hard about the lingering message, this is one to see.

Paula McConnell is a freelance writer living in Vallejo.



Rachel Obrestad - Phil Olorco



Laina Perry - Cassandra Metz



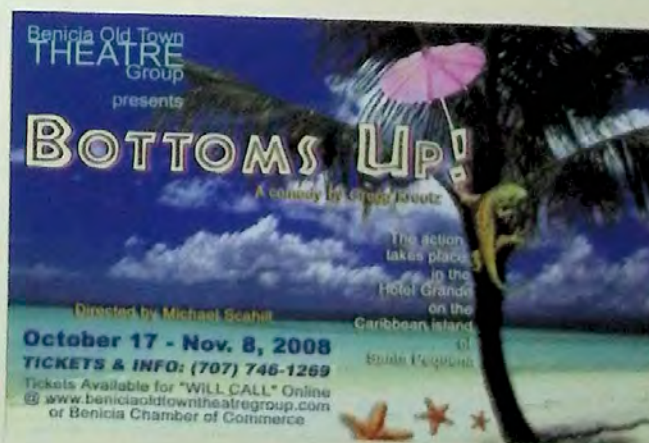
Daniel Morgan - Cassandra Metz



Daniel Morgan - Cassandra Metz
Sarah E. Rozett



Laina Perry - Phil Olorco





IRS Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service
www.irs.gov



LOVE, SEX
and the
IRS

A Comedy in Three Acts
By William Van Zandt
and Jane Mumore
Directed by Kai Aikawa

April 17 - May 9, 2009
Tickets & Info: (707) 746-1269
@ www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com
or Benicia Chamber of Commerce

Location: Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J. Street, Benicia

Love, Sex, and the IRS...

Love, Sex, and the IRS lives up to its name! BOTTG's 45th Season opened this Friday Night, April 17th, 2009 at the BDES Hall in Benicia with a ROMP through an East Coast apartment house and several lives that begins as a little WHITE LIE to the IRS. But it grows!

Julian Huguet as "Leslie" gives a knockout performance as the best friend of roommate "Jonathan Trachman" played by Sean West who tries his damndest to convince the IRS man played by Craig Snider that he truly is Jonathan's wife for "tax purposes." The ensuing cast of hilarious characters including Janet Duhe, Dan Clark, Casandra Metz, Andrea Gomes, Wayne Tomacchio, and Shawn Bonnington, directed by Kai Aikawa, will KNOCK your socks off. A definite Must See! Benicia Old Town Theatre Group rocks the house with continuing laughter and fresh comedy! A very believable cast, excellent apartment stage setting, and an early light show interaction with music to set the next scene(s) will have you believing every minute of what NOT to ever Tell the IRS!!

Peter and Janice Jaffe Bray
With continued thanks to BOTTG
and Board Member Dyanne Vojvoda

Ticket Information: (707) 746-1269
BDES Hall 140 West J Street, Benicia, CA 94510
www.oldtowntheatregroup.com





SEX



LOVE, SEX
and the **IR\$** presented by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

A comedy in Three Acts
By William Van Zandt and Jane Milmore
Directed by Kai Aikawa

Opening Night Champagne Gala tickets \$25
General Admission \$20
April 17 - May 9, 2009
Tickets & Info 707.746.1269
Tickets available for "will-call" online at
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com
or Benicia Chamber of Commerce

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St.
Benicia, CA 94510

Things to Do Places to Go People to See
Free **WEEKENDER** Magazine
April 2009

Things to Do Places to Go People to See
Free **WEEKENDER** Magazine
March 2009

LOVE, SEX presented by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
and the **IR\$**

April 17 - May 9, 2009

Cast: Andrea Gomes, Casandra Metz, Craig Snider, Janet Duhe, Julian Huguot, Sean West, Shawn Bonnington,

A Comedy in Three Acts
By William Van Zandt and Jane Milmore
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Tickets & Info: (707) 746-1269
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1040

Inside Benicia

Circulation 14,000
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November 2008



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group Bottom's Up!

What happens when you combine a grand hotel on a Caribbean island, an earnest aerobics instructor, a suitcase filled with money-laundered cash, a soft-core movie director and his outraged ex-star, the hotel owner and her corrupt nephew? A hilarious farce, that's what! Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's current play "Bottom's Up!" by Gregg Kreutz, directed by Michael Scahill contains all the elements of a rollicking good time. Tickets are still available for the last few weeks of this comedy production. Don't miss out on the outrageous fun! Performances continue weekends through November 8, Friday and Saturday 8pm and Sunday 4pm. Benicia Old Town Theatre Group productions are held at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J Street, Benicia, CA 94510. For tickets and more information call 707.746.1269 or visit beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.

Photo by Joe Messina, Messina Photography

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group
presents

BOTTOMS UP!

A comedy by Gregg Kreutz

Directed by Michael Scahill
Assistant Director Rachel Obrestad

The action takes place in the Hotel Grande on the Caribbean island of Santa Pequena

October 17 - Nov. 8, 2008
TICKETS & INFO: (707) 746-1269
Friday & Saturday 8pm
Sunday 4pm
All Opening Night Tickets, Oct. 17 \$25
General admission \$20, seniors/students \$18
Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street, Benicia
Tickets Available for "WILL CALL" Online
@ www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com
or Benicia Chamber of Commerce

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BOTTOMS UP!

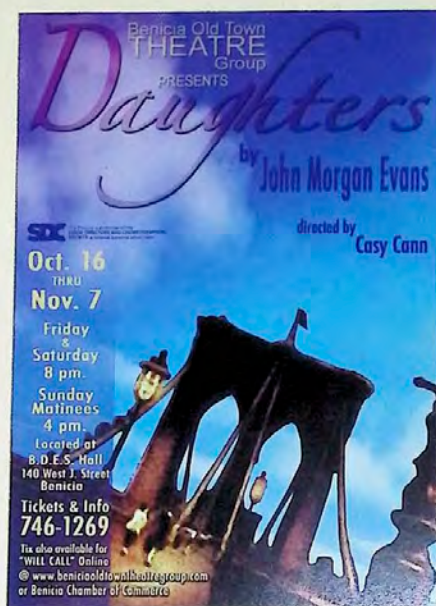
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TICKETS & INFO: (707) 746-1269

4th of July Float 2009



2009 Spirit / Ghost Walk

Halloween reprise!

Out where whistles wail
and *Frankenstein* stumbles,
the *Mad Flatter* is as gaily as ever
and *John* is *crisply* as ever
... PB

I don't know when I put
the idea to stick my head
into a pumpkin ... perhaps
it was the nursery rhyme:

"Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater,
had a wife and couldn't keep her.
So he put her in a pumpkin shell,
and there he kept her very well."

That still makes no sense to
me, but perhaps that's the beauty
of nursery rhymes. They feel the
imaginary and reality is only a
secondary consideration ... there's
some *Bob Dylan* like philosophy
in there also, I suspect.

This year, Janice and I were
invited by Dyanne Nyrova of the
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
to take part in the Benicia Historical
Society's Ghost Walk. I felt I
had at least one more pumpkin in
me, so I scooped around Raley's
and Safeway for my stuff.

You have to PLAN your
Pumpkin Day very carefully. First
rule: Don't carve the pumpkin
until the day you're going to wear
it. Second-day wearings are NOT
really possible or pleasant. One
Halloween I rode BART to work
in San Francisco wearing my outfit.
I was a big hit at the Pleasant
Hill Station and all along the route
to the Embarcadero Station, but
by nightfall coming home, the
fruit flies were inside my pumpkin
head buzzing around with me.
That was NO fun!

The eye holes have to be huge
since you'll have NO peripheral
vision inside your head. To com-
pensate, make those suckers as big
as you can but not so as to destroy
the structural strength of the shell
itself. As you walk, you'll have to
swing your head slightly from
side to side just to see around you
— and don't forget to look down
toward the sidewalk. Walking on
concrete is one thing, but
city sidewalks and curbs are
something else.

Like a kite for the bridge of the
nose holding the carrot. Your eyes
won't focus correctly because of
that dark space between them, so
walking around on Benicia's curi-
ous concrete sidewalks ain't for
the timid or the wobbly.

The Indian corn has to be
bought early, cut to length and
watered down and dried to get the
stalks to really flare out and be
dramatic — because what good is
a pumpkin head without function-

The A Cappella



Hardyman
Peter Bray
columnist

The Beale Street Pumpkin
had carrot tops for hair and
because I carved it the night
before the next day's wearing,
overnight they all wilted (see
"How To Wear A Pumpkin" at my
Web site, www.peterbray.org) ...

So where were we? Oh, yeah:
Straw flowers on top are best
because they're stiff and won't
wilt and they come in bizarre col-
ors — BUT don't shove them too
deeply into the pumpkin, you
don't want them sticking through
and endangering your own com-
fort. Speaking of which: All that
pumpkin slop and seeds have to
come out! You want that thing to
be shiny bright and clean inside
BEFORE you stick your head into
it ... and make the pumpkin inner
top as flat as you can, it will be
resting on the top of your head.
There's no room for a hat or a
skull cushion, though some future
Pumpkin Wizard might want to
consider that.



You can buy the straw flowers
at the flower departments at Safe-
way and/or Raley's, but don't for-
get Michael's in Vallejo! They
have some outstanding stuff, and
great colors and textures too, and
a colored, feather boat!

Go for it! I'll be watching for
you next year!

Halloween Walk 2009

Down where seagulls fly and
ducks walk,
I was trying to bring some corpo-
rate bling
to the waterfront, I shined my
Wingtip loafers
with tassels, made sure my Dock-
ers
were unstained and stunning,
my blue suede jacket and black T-
shirt
as poetically focused as possible,
then I added the pumpkin head,
dried flowers,
miscellaneous feathers, and the
multicolored,
feathered bow; a page straight out
of the Bechtel SF office Hand-
book.
pages 1984-'94, see for yourself.
The species continues to evolve:
<http://www.peterbray.org/odyssey.html>
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reserved

LBL Halloween Queen

After 6 1/2 years at Brown
and Caldwell Consulting Engi-
neers, and before starting at Bech-
tel in the city, I spent a year-and-a-
half at the Lawrence Berkeley
Lab, up on the hill, running an Art
Group of nine artists for the
Physics Researchers. After a year
or so of plotting every muon,
quark, proton, black hole explo-
sion and/or radiation on the planet,
it was time for Halloween.

Janice loaned me some of her
clothes ... I think I already had the

Afro from a previous party or
event. Bechtel had no idea what
kind of guy they were hiring the
following year ... or maybe a
Good Word carried from across the
Bay? Note that this was the
Pre-Computer Age ...

Tan Pony Out For a Romp

I took the Tan Pony out for a
romp, or maybe it took me ... It
was a moonless October night, a
good night for witch howling, or
looking for Halloween beasts on
the highway.

I was on 680 North headed
home from work ... late ... It had
been sunny and bright, but on the
cold side of a day, you could build
up a sweat and then get chilled in
the shadows, that kind of a day ...
and shadows were growing longer
daily like fingers on a witch want-
ing more, always more, ginger-
bread cookies and things like that
... Preparations were in every
mind for Halloween ... some of us
had even done Halloween early.

Bob Dylan was playing
something on my CD player ...
romping music and lyrics ...

I cracked the left power win-
dow down a bit as if to suck out
the tan pony's excess aspirations,
a combination of horsepower and
spent horseshoes, and we romped
towards the Toll Booth in the
same manner we had been romping
all the way from Oakland ...
The FasTrak Express Lane is defi-
nitely a good place for a Yahoo! at
this time of night ... sometimes a
good romp blows all the witches
off the highway and the ghosts
outta the glovebox too ... Yeehaw!

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Peter Bray can be reached by
email at PetBray@AOL.com or
visit his Web site at www.peterbray.org.

FRIDAY, OCT. 30, 2009



INSIDEBENICIA

Volume 4 Issue 12
October 2009

October Events Tricks, Treats and Tastes of the Season

10 INSIDEBENICIA

AN 18 INTERVIEW WITH DYANNE VOJVODA



What happened at that first BOTTG meeting that drew you into the group?

I was a complete stranger and they said they needed someone to volunteer to do this one job. I looked around and realized everyone else already had something to do, so I did this thing for her hand somewhat (initially). The job was to make sure we had enough people to work at all the tables—we were a dinner theater then—plus bartenders. It was about ten people every night, and we had six-week runs then. ... I got through that; I didn't quit (laughing). That was the beginning.

The theatre group is 45 years old. How has it adapted, especially during difficult economic times?

We're so cautious of who we are. ... We know our boundaries, and think about why we're doing what we're doing. We were doing six-week productions and we've cut that to four. We cut what we need to cut. The only person who gets paid is the director. Once we lost our resident set designer, we had other people step in. We had a paid costume, but we thought we could get someone else to do it and, so far, we have.

We've made changes that needed to be made (over the years). You have to be so conscious of what people want to see. We can always use donors and sponsors, but we live within our means.

By Sue Summer-Moore

Dyanne Vojvoda was shopping for wallpaper when a chance encounter with a high school acquaintance led to a series of life-changing events.

At the friend's suggestion, Dyanne went to a general meeting of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group that same night. She was a newcomer to town and didn't know anyone in the room.

"It was a brave moment for me," she says.

Twenty-eight years later, she is an integral part of the group, which has been producing live theater here since 1964.

She even met her husband, attorney Dan Clark, that first year of volunteering with the theatre group. "I'd seen this luncheon on the stage, speaking Italian; and I asked someone, 'Who is this guy?'" she says. They've been married 18 years and both remain active in BOTTG.

While Dan performs, Dyanne remains strictly backstage. She has held several board positions over the years, including multiple terms as president.

Her work as a costumer for "Love, Sex and the IRS" earned her a nomination this year for an Arty, one of nine BOTTG nominations for the awards honoring performing arts in Solano County. The company brought home one Arty at the awards show last month; Paul Zill was honored for his set design for the BOTTG production of "Bottoms Up," while Benicia High School earned four Arty awards in the youth theater division for its production of "Once Upon a Mattress."

Dyanne is coordinating publicity for the production of "Daughters" that opens October 16. Dyanne, 60, grew up in the Bay Area. She retired five years ago after 32 years as a deputy probation officer for juveniles in Contra Costa County. Her sister Judy Neuell was the first member of the family to settle in Benicia, and their mother Mollie Vojvoda moved to town 14 years ago. Dyanne and Dan share their home with their two cats.

How can people support the local theater community?

Buy a ticket. The cast needs an audience to perform for. They pour their hearts out and there's nothing like having a full house. They need to hear voices; and it's easy to get tickets online, at will call or through the Chamber of Commerce.

How much sleep do you get the week before opening night?

Not much. In fact, when I worked at the probation department, I usually took one week's vacation before opening weekend. It's like planning for a party, plus we have about 30 friends for opening night. ... I live for opening night, then I can rest. I might work the front desk some nights, maybe bartend one night, but the hardest work is done.

What motivates you to stay involved after all these years?

I wouldn't have known Belinda or Steve (our dear, dear friends) we go on vacation with and do so many things with) if I hadn't been involved with the theatre. Really, so many friends.

In theater, there's a risk that everyone takes and if it is a success, you all share in it and want to celebrate that. Even if you just painted one wall, you are part of that success. You see success and feel like you're part of it.

What's your dream for the theatre group's future?

Having a theater really is my goal. We have about \$10,000 in our future building fund. It's come from renting costumes, the desserts, the tips at the bar. We've worked hard to save that money. I've always felt strongly that we had to put out an effort because there are so many valuable groups vying for funds.

What do you and Dan like to do on date nights?

We like to go to San Francisco, have dinner and see theater. But we're not fond of musicals. I liked seeing August in Orange County and Amadeus and Sing. I'm not that fond of comedies, either. I like drama, I like to be moved, I like to learn, I like to get lost in the play. Dramas touch me. I find them very moving.

Out and About Everybody Loves Art



- 1 Arts Benicia Board members take a break: Gene Doherty, Renee Jordan, and Lee Wilder-Snyder
- 2 Owners of the Relik Tavern enjoy the view from the other side of the bar: Tom Hamilton, Cathi Robins, Charlie Apsey, and Delinda and Zoey Pagan
- 3 Enjoying the art: Kelly Linnell, Jill Lowell, Christine and Mark Bergman
- 4 Inside Benicia photographers on the other side of the lens: Joey Baker and Peggy Edlin
- 5 Having fun with friends: Katie Holman, Martha Anderson, Chris Mead, and Joan Ramirez
- 6 Solano Land Trust luminaries: Linda Sonner, Teri Engstrom and Sue Wickham
- 7 Benicia Community Garden Coordinator Meg Grunio
- 8 Local teachers/volunteers contemplate a bid: Pat Hall and Louise Garrison
- 9 Downtown Dynamite Leah and George Shultorn, owners of Studio 44 and Debbie and Rob Machado, owners of Remaking the Home
- 10 Benicia Old Town Theatre members enjoying the auction: Paul Zill, Jane Koski, Samuel "Oakland Sam" Morse, Sharon Payne-Bolton, and Craig Snyder
- 11 Following a beautiful evening: Joanne Corbales, Simone Chery, Sue Ferris, Brad Adams, Julie Donaldson and Pat Reff

Editor's Note:

Joey Baker is a whirlwind of energy and enthusiasm. Originally from Chicago, Joey has lived in Benicia for five years. She has already made her mark by helping to reorganize the Benicia Education Foundation, serving as board president for several years. Joey brings fresh ideas to the magazine as editorial advisor. She and her husband Neil have two children.

Peggy Edlin is a teacher and is currently substituting for BUSD. She is a talented photographer who enjoys taking candid photos. She lives in Benicia with her husband Doug and their three children. Peggy is a long-time community volunteer at Benicia's elementary schools and regular contributor to Inside Benicia. She has teamed up with Joey for this fun and often funny feature. 18

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's Fall Play Daughters

Four generations of Italian-American family women gather in a kitchen in Brooklyn to deal with a family crisis, while the ailing patriarch is in a downstairs bedroom playing Causo records. Written by John Morgan Evans, directed by Casey Cann.

Theater location: The B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J Street, Benicia
Performances: Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. from Oct. 16 through Nov. 7 and Sundays at 4 p.m. on Oct. 18, Oct. 25, and Nov. 1

Tickets: \$25 for Opening Night Gala, Friday, Oct. 16 (includes champagne)

\$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors/students for all other performances

Group discounts available. For information, call 707-746-5326.

Tickets are available online at beniciatdonthetheatregroup.com, at the Chamber of Commerce (601 First Street), or at the box. Doors open one hour before curtain. 18



How many people work behind the scenes during each performance?

We have at least 12 people minimum every night. They estimate we have about 3,000 hours of behind-the-scenes volunteer labor for each show, regardless of the number of actors. When you add in the cast, they estimate 9,000 volunteer hours per production.

What's been your biggest surprise during your 28 years in theater?

The biggest delight, I'd have to say, was when Dan and I were dating. He was in a show, *Chaplin Two* by Neil Simon. ... The set had two apartments. I had played a grieving widow and a divorcee lived in the other apartment. In Dan's apartment was a library/bookshelf and he put all my pictures in boxes around the room. I was his dead wife Barbara. That's the joke people tell about me—the only time I've been on stage is in my photos as dead wife Barbara. After the play, there was a cast party and they gave out funny awards. There was one for the person who always had a smile, was never late, always got her blocking right on and on and it was me for the "best" as dead wife Barbara.

6B

THE ARTS

Times-Herald
Friday, October 9, 2009Director finds
'Daughters'
easy to swallowBy Rich Freedman
Times-Herald staff writer

Daughters" is a comedy-drama about an Italian-American family in Brooklyn. Not that families have to be from Brooklyn or be Italian-American to have drama. Benicia Old Town Theatre Group board president Dyanne Vojvoda attests to that.

"This beautifully written piece covers family drama we may have all experienced," said Vojvoda. "I was especially moved by this play while reading it because it is so familiar to me and my Croatian family."

"My 93-year-old mother is alive in Benicia. I have sisters (of varying relationships), and fantastic nieces/nephews (grandchildren to my mother) and we are all in this comedy-drama. I think these rich characters are in all of our families or friendships. It seemed so timely to showcase a drama."

See Daughters, 7B

Courtesy photo/Messina Photography
The Benicia Old Town Theatre presents 'Daughters,' starring, left to right, Carolyn Kraetsch, Colleen Walsh, Jean Barnhart, Natalie Rapp and Rebekah Vega. The show opens with a champagne gala on Oct. 16.

Oct. 16

BENICIA OLD
TOWN THEATRE
GROUP PRESENTS
'DAUGHTERS'

The ARTY award-winning Benicia Old Town Theatre Group presents its 2009 fall production of "Daughters" at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., in Benicia at 8 p.m.

The production runs Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m. through Nov. 7.

The play, by John Morgan, tells the story of four generations of an Italian-American family in Brooklyn from the women's points of view; the five-member cast is entirely female.

Tickets cost \$20 for general admission and \$18 for seniors and students with ID. Tickets are available at the door; online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatre-group.com; or at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce at 601 First St., No. 100.

For more information, call 746-1269.



BENICIA HERALD

11th Year • No. 132

If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well

Always 50¢

Kitchen sink and all

'Daughters' set design
unique, realistic, crew says

By BETHANY A. MORE
Assistant Editor

The varnish on the kitchen table set drying beneath the stage lights as the newly crafted kitchen — with real running water — received some of its finishing touches Wednesday.

The cast of "Daughters," Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's upcoming production, will not have to pretend they're in a kitchen on opening night next week. The kitchen cabinets, made from scratch, are done. Water trails through the kitchen faucet. Even the stove works.

The play's construction crew built the kitchen from scratch. Theater group President Paul Zill said it's the



PAUL ZILL stands on the as-yet-incomplete set of the upcoming Benicia Old Town Theatre production.

BOTTG

[Continued from Page A1]

most unique set they've worked on yet.

That's saying something. Last year Zill won an Arty Award — given every year in Solano County for excellence in theater — for his set design on the group's production of "Bottoms Up!"

"That kind of surprised me," Zill said of the award. "It came out nice, but it's not what I consider my best work."

After reading the script for "Daughters," Zill said he decided to "get real." The entire play, written by John Morgan Evans, takes place in the kitchen of a Brooklyn home.

"Most plays come with recommended set designs," Zill told The Herald on Wednesday, but even then, he lets his imagination go to work.

"I'm looking at what the setting is," he said. "It's a flat in New York in the 1950s. It should be kind of plain. We don't want cabinets that would exceed what they would be in the 1950s."

The white motif running through the kitchen not only keeps a plain, but will help the characters and their props be more visible, Zill said.

A good set can help energize the actors, he said.

"People in the audience are going to feel like they're looking at a real kitchen," Zill said.

Volunteer Ron Macdonald knows about constructing real kitchens — and other parts of a building. The Pinole resident has worked a lot of "real-life" construction jobs and said building sets for the theater is easier and faster. The crew will have spent about one week building the set by the end of today.

Macdonald has been helping

build BOTTG sets for about 10 years now. He says the "Daughters" set is the most unusual so far. For one thing, he said, there are no walls. Without them, Zill said, the light crew will be able to splash different colors against the set's white backdrop.

The lack of walls and the presence of free-standing doors are new to veteran BOTTG actor and set construction volunteer Dan Clark.

"People are going to be amazed when they see this (set) on opening night," he said.

Zill agrees. Asked why he enjoys dedicating so much of his time to theater set design, he said he's drawn to the creative process.

"It's art. It's creating," he said.

"Daughters" opens Oct. 16 and runs Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. through Nov. 7. For information or to purchase tickets, call 746-1269. Visit www.beniciaoldtowntheatre-group.com.

Daughters ...

Continued from 6B

comedy.

With a five-woman cast, director Cann is ready to let everyone shine, she said. The production opens Oct. 16 with a champagne gala at 1 D.E.S. Hall in Benicia.

"It is not a play about women, for women per se," Cann said. "I see this as a study of American life with the focus on one ethnic background. Even if someone is not Italian-American, I am certain they can identify with the character traits of someone in the show."

Yes, even men can applaud the play, Cann said.

"If a person likes to laugh, then they are likely to enjoy the show," she said.

The featured performers include Carolyn Kraetsch, Colleen Walsh, Jean Barnhart, Natalie Rapp, and Rebekah Vega.

"Rehearsals have gone even better than expected," Cann said. "I have both first-time actors as well as quite accomplished women. All have been patient, dedicated and truly generous to one another. That was what I was hoping for, but it isn't something I expected."

With this cast, "there has been less drama in terms of what is going on off-stage" than a usual mixed gender production, Cann said. "There's a young high schooler that has definite church and academic commitments and the rest of the cast is married and three are grandmas. So, the show is just part of their full, busy lives."

Cann was asked if her approach would be different with the all-women cast if it were a man.

"That is a question I would not know how to begin to answer," she said. "It strikes me really funny because what makes this show worthy of an audience's time is that these women are identifiable as the true-to-life characters they are, whether or not someone is Italian-American or not, people will understand their irony and idiosyncrasies. That is to say, the playwright, who wrote these characters with such an intricacy and charm, is man. He got who they were at the heart of them. So, it seems to me that if a man cared about these characters, he, too, could do them justice."

Cann did twerk one aspect of the play — manga, manga.

"These women are in one location — the Di Angelo family kitchen," Cann said. "Since food is central to Italian culture, I think I have increased the amount of food these characters eat during the course of the show from how I saw it in the beginning. I am hoping the audience can smell the pasta cooking."

If you go

What: "Daughters" by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
When: Oct. 16-Nov. 7
Where: 1 D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
Tickets: \$20 general, \$18 seniors/students
Info: 746-1269, beniciaoldtowntheatre-group.com

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group
PRESENTS

Daughters

by John Morgan Evans

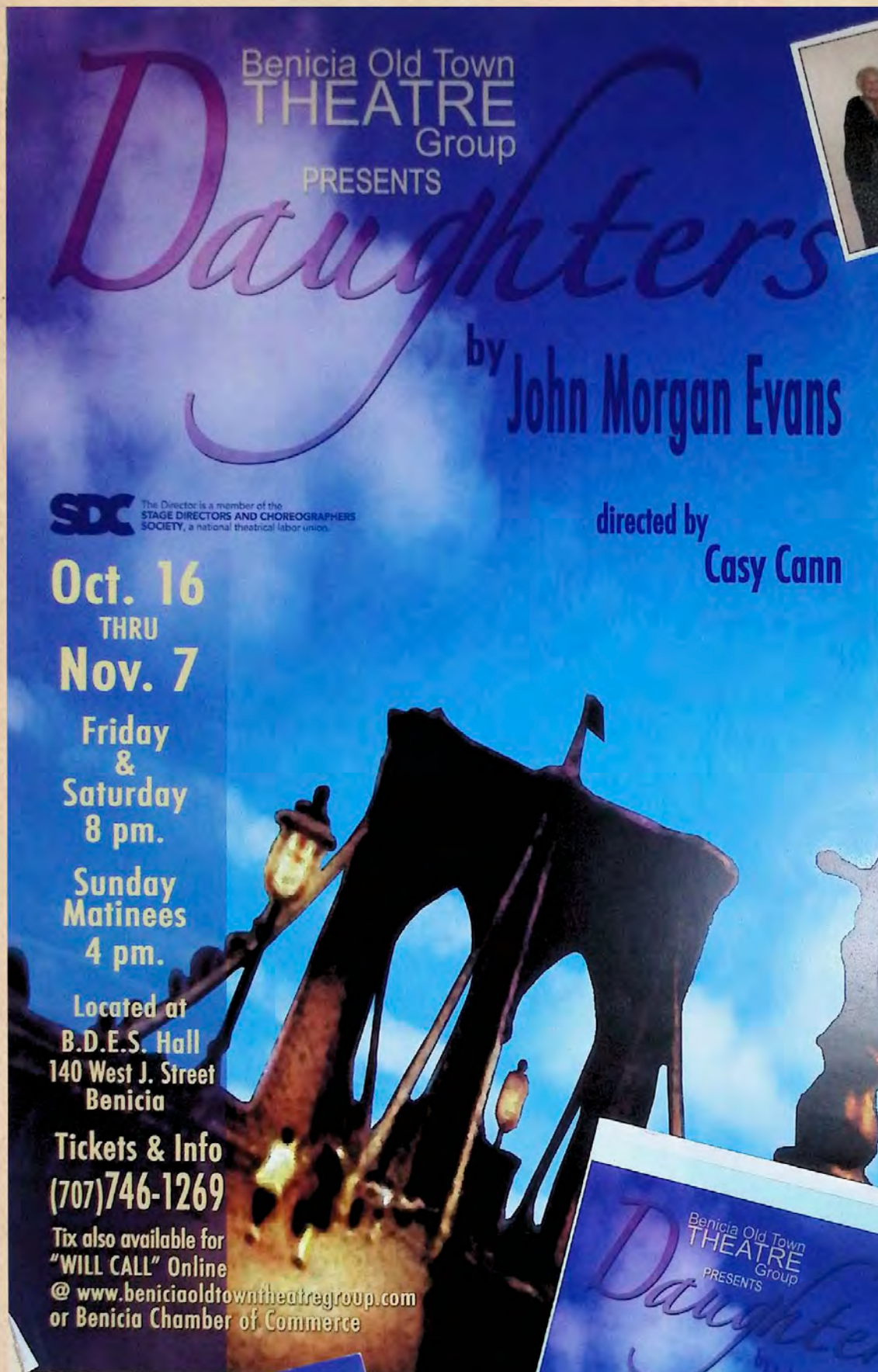
directed by Casy Cann

Oct. 16
THRU
Nov. 7
Friday
&
Saturday
8 pm.
Sunday
Matinees
4 pm.

Located at
B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J. Street
Benicia

Tickets & Info
(707)746-1269

Tix also available for
"WILL CALL" Online
@ www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com
or Benicia Chamber of Commerce




Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
a drama by John Morgan Evans, directed by Casy Cann, comes
to a close November 7. Four generations of Italian American
women gather in the DiAngelo's Brooklyn kitchen to deal with
life, death and cannoli. Don't miss the final show! The theater
is located at the B.D.E.S. Hall at 140 West J Street. Tickets are
available online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com or at
the Benicia Chamber of Commerce.

Pictured, left to right, are cast members Carolyn Knecht,
Calleen Walsh, Jean Barnhart, Natalie Rapp and
Rebekah Vega. Photo by Joe Messina
Cover: Styled by Margaret Bowles. Photo by Jerry Bowles

People
arts and entertainment

Wilson goes 'Unstapled' for reality series

The Benicia story
Lena Wilson, 34, is a Benicia resident who has been featured in a reality series called "Unstapled" on the E! network. Wilson, who is a Benicia resident, is a Benicia resident who has been featured in a reality series called "Unstapled" on the E! network. Wilson, who is a Benicia resident, is a Benicia resident who has been featured in a reality series called "Unstapled" on the E! network.

BOTTG offers a gripping 'Daughters'

The Benicia story
The Benicia story is a gripping drama that explores the lives of four generations of Italian American women. The Benicia story is a gripping drama that explores the lives of four generations of Italian American women. The Benicia story is a gripping drama that explores the lives of four generations of Italian American women.

'Toy Story' maker earns producer prize

The Benicia story
The Benicia story is a gripping drama that explores the lives of four generations of Italian American women. The Benicia story is a gripping drama that explores the lives of four generations of Italian American women. The Benicia story is a gripping drama that explores the lives of four generations of Italian American women.

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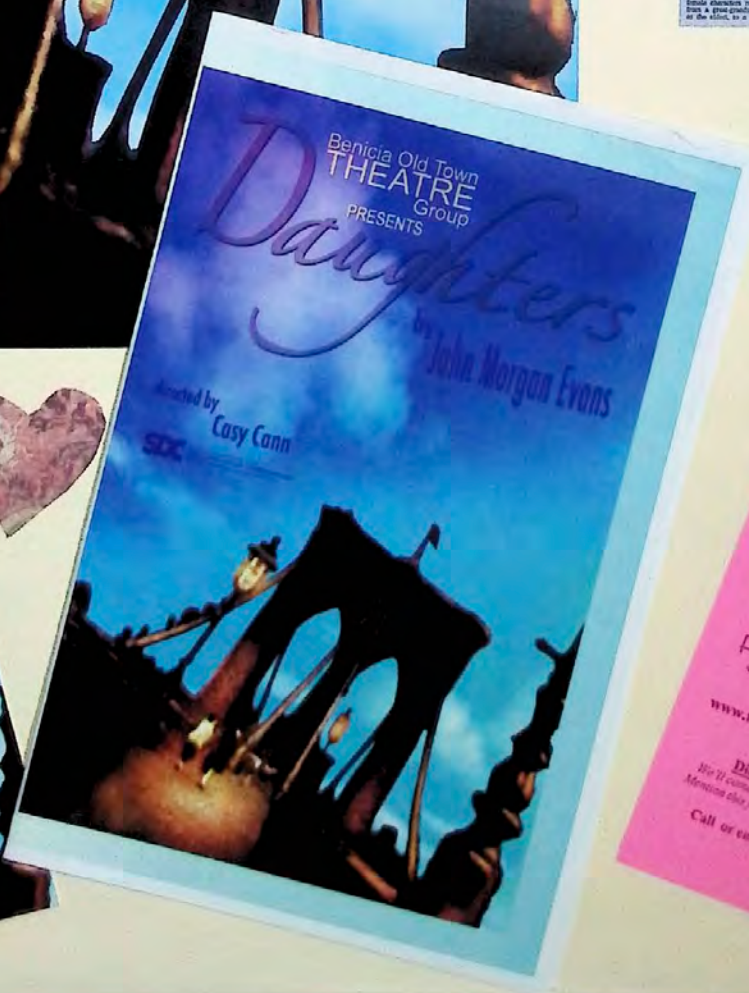


Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group
PRESENTS

Daughters

by John Morgan Evans

directed by Casy Cann



Who else wants to go out after the show?

BOTTG has made arrangements with the First St. Cafe downtown to give you a great value. They will also **DONATE \$1000** to the Benicia Chamber of Commerce on November 30, 2009. You get a great meal & you help the BOTTG at the same time. First St. Cafe is open late on show nights, so come right after the show! Seared Ahi, Berry Crisp with Dregger's Grand Ice Cream, Gourmet Pizza, Tiramisu, Key Lime Pie, Crab & Artichoke dip, are you getting hungry yet? These are just a few of the actors who star in our performance when you visit Uptown @ the Cafe. Open every Thursday, Friday & Saturday night.

Bring in this flyer and get \$7 off any purchase or \$25 or more! Good anytime!

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Expires December 31, 2009.

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707-746-1400
Uptown from 6:00 to 11:30 pm (Friday & Sat.)
www.firststcafe.com

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We'd love to hear from you! Please fill out our survey for your next visit. Mention this flyer & we'll give you a free appetizer or beverage or just delivery for your event! Call or email Mark right now! 707-746-1400

Spotlight

Grandma steals 'Daughters' spotlight

THEATER REVIEW BY ELIZABETH WARNIMONT
Special to The Herald

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group brings a new and different kind of drama to the stage this month with a simple setting, all-female play by John Morgan Evans. "Daughters," directed by Arty award-winning Cacy Cann, portrays the relationship between four generations of women who comprise four generations of a Catholic Italian-American family. All the action takes place in a present-day suburban New York household — in fact, everything happens in the kitchen.

The action plays out much as one might expect: Mom (Jean Barnhart) stands at the stove fixing dinner as her two grown daughters (Natalie Rapp as Patty Ann and Coleen Walsh as Tessie) help out, chatting about their husbands as they dry dishes and tear lettuce. Grandma (Carolyn Kraetsch) sits quietly in her chair, listening, while teenage granddaughter Cetta (Rebekah Vega) steps in occasionally, professing to know what's best for everyone. Meanwhile, "Pop" is presumed to be resting upstairs in bed.

Lending entertainment value to a simple premise such as this demands some charged emotional interplay, lively action or alternative focus on the stage, and a compelling subplot. The Benicia production does offer some realistic displays of emotion, and the script includes a

couple of parallel plot threads, but gripping moments are few, and the dramatic tension among the characters only occasionally rises above a low boil.

However, thanks to the generous improvisational leeway indicated by the playwright — together with excellent direction by Cann — some exceptional character development serves to breathe life into the performance. Kraetsch, a real-life grandmother of 12, was the audience favorite on opening night last Friday as the mite character, Grandma. Despite having no lines, Kraetsch managed to create a distinct character loaded with personality, utilizing only facial expression, posture and the few props at her disposal. Ostensibly literate only in her native Italian, she nevertheless responded markedly to the conversation around her.

Whenever a shouting match got started, for example, Grandma calmly pulled up her rosary and start looking up, silently praying as she counted the beads. When food was placed before her, she reveled in every aspect of it, joyfully shaking salt and pepper on her own and others' plates, grabbing bits with her hands and dropping them delightedly into her mouth.

Other strengths of the production included Walsh's heated moments as Tessie, the neurotic, once-institutionalized older daughter. When she got into it with Rapp, Barnhart or Vega, the interactions were highly believable, lifting the show out of its momentary lulls. A couple of subplots also provided a heightened level



THE LADIES OF 'DAUGHTERS': From left, Carolyn Kraetsch, Jean Barnhart, Natalie Rapp and Rebekah Vega.

of interest, the first and most compelling being Pop's apparent throat cancer and the looming decision as to whether he should have his larynx removed. High-strung Tessie can't fathom why other family members would even consider opting out of the surgery, whereas her daughter and younger sister are more enthusiastic about an alternative treatment that could spare Pop's voice.

Second, it is revealed early on that

Tessie's husband is involved in an extramarital affair. This provides the actress an opportunity for expression of shock and grief, which Walsh handles exceedingly well. Throwing in an off-stage, violent confrontation involving a gun and torn clothing, however, taxes the audience's tolerance for dramatic license and steals from the play's natural flow.

Finally, it comes to light that younger sister Patty Ann's husband is also

IF YOU GO

"Daughters" opens in BENICIA, 7 p.m. TIMES ON OCTOBER 16, 7:30, 12:30 & 8 p.m. WWW.BENICIAOLDTOWNTHEATRE.COM

involved in some unscrupulous activity. At first, she behaves as if the thought never crossed her mind, but as she coolly makes her exit after putting on her coat and walking away from the kitchen, she confides that she knows what her husband is "up to." She then tells the family how much she loves them, regardless of her sometimes heated arguments.

It is not clear what the playwright intended by having the most tender exchange in the play spoken at such a pronounced distance. Perhaps Patty Ann was simply feeling vulnerable after disclosing her knowledge of her husband's indiscretion. Maybe Evans meant to emphasize the otherwise subtle reference to this character's disinclination to face life's harsher realities.

The play addresses some of the complex issues that occur within a family, and it does so with humor and creativity. It does not get down and dirty, nor is it highly sentimental. Where plot and passion are under-exploited, the humor and personality of the characters provide the glue that holds the performance together.

Elizabeth Warnimont holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Germanic language and literature from the University of California-Santa Barbara. She is currently a substitute teacher for the Benicia Unified School District.

'DAUGHTERS' PLAYING AT BOTTE

The ARTY award-winning Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of "Daughters" runs Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. through Nov. 7 at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall.

Tickets cost \$20 for general admission and \$18 for seniors and students with IDs. Tickets are available at the door, online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.com, or at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce at 601 First St., No. 100. The Historic B.D.E.S. Hall is located at 140 West J St. in Benicia. For more information, call 746-1269.



Family ties



DIRECTOR Cacy Cann will usher in the new season for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group with a production of "Daughters," by John Morgan Evans. The play is about four generations of Italian-American women living, loving, and quarreling in the Bronx.

More Editor Staff and courtesy photo (above)

Local troupe preps season opener

Benicia Old Town Theatre group to open new play, 'Daughters,' Oct. 16

BY BETHANY A. MONK
Assistant Editor

Cacy Cann is over the moon. The director of Benicia Old Town Theatre's fall production of "Daughters," which opens Oct. 16, said she couldn't ask for more.

"Benicia Old Town Theatre — they are just a lovely, well-oiled machine," Cann said.

Cann has directed several produc-



can family. They live in Brooklyn. They quarrel. They laugh. They say things that may shock people.

"This family talks to each other like they are angry, but it's out of love," Cann said. "We know people like this, we've met people like this. You know that at their core, there is nothing mean-spirited about them — they just don't speak in flowery terms."

The all-female cast includes Coleen Walsh (Tessie), Jean Barnhart (Mom), Natalie Rapp (Patty Ann), Carolyn Kraetsch (Grandma) and Rebekah Vega (Cetta) — all of whom, Cann said, have made her quite pleased as rehearsals and preparations have unfolded.

[See Daughters, Page A3]

DAUGHTERS

[Continued from Page A1]

Cann noted that Vega, the youngest member of the cast, took on the role of Cetta nearly at the last minute after another actor was unable to do so.

"It's a very challenging role, especially for somebody younger than the character," Cann said, adding that Cetta is 17.

Cann may be enjoying the directing process, but the actors themselves said they are enjoying rehearsals and the dual strength of the play's humor and crises.

"Tessie is tough on the outside but very nervous and high-strung," Coleen Walsh said of her character. "During the course of the play, her father has cancer, her husband is cheating on her."

It's not all drama, though. There's plenty of humor, too, says Carolyn Kraetsch.

Kraetsch says that playing "Grandma" means she sits there, plays with her rosary and prays most of the time on stage.

"I don't understand what everybody's saying," she said — Grandma speaks Italian and doesn't understand English.

Jean Barnhart said Mom is another interesting character.

"She's the kind of mother that tells her daughter she's gotten fat ... and very naively," she said. "She's loving and means everything with love, but often says things that are inappropriate."

Cann, a Martinez resident, is no stranger to the world of directing. She graduated in 2004 from the Actors Studio Drama School in

New York with a master's in directing. She is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society; in 2008, her work on Neil Simon's "Chapter Two" for The Mira Theatre Guild earned her multiple Arty Award nominations.

Opening night tickets for "Daughters" are \$25, which includes the show and opening night gala. The production runs Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m., and Sundays at 4 p.m., through Nov. 7. The hall is located at 140 West J St. in Benicia.

General admission tickets are \$20 and \$18 for seniors and students with IDs. Tickets are available at the door, online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.com, or at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce at 601 First St., No. 100. For more information, call 746-1269.

Things to Do Places to Go People to See
Free WEEKENDER Magazine
 November 2009

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE
Daughters
 by John Morgan Evans
 directed by Casy Cann

Oct. 16
 Nov. 7

Friday 8 pm
 Saturday 2 pm
 Sunday Matinee 4 pm

Tickets & Info: 746-1269

Tickets: \$20 General Admission
 \$12.00 Seniors (62)/Students
 Reserved Seating & Discount: (10 or more)
 TICKETS ALSO SOLD AT DOOR
 Doors open 1 hour before curtain

No Host Bar available before show and intermission

The Cast
 Colleen Walsh, Jean Barnhart, Natalie Rapp,
 Carolyn Kraetsch, Rebekah Vega

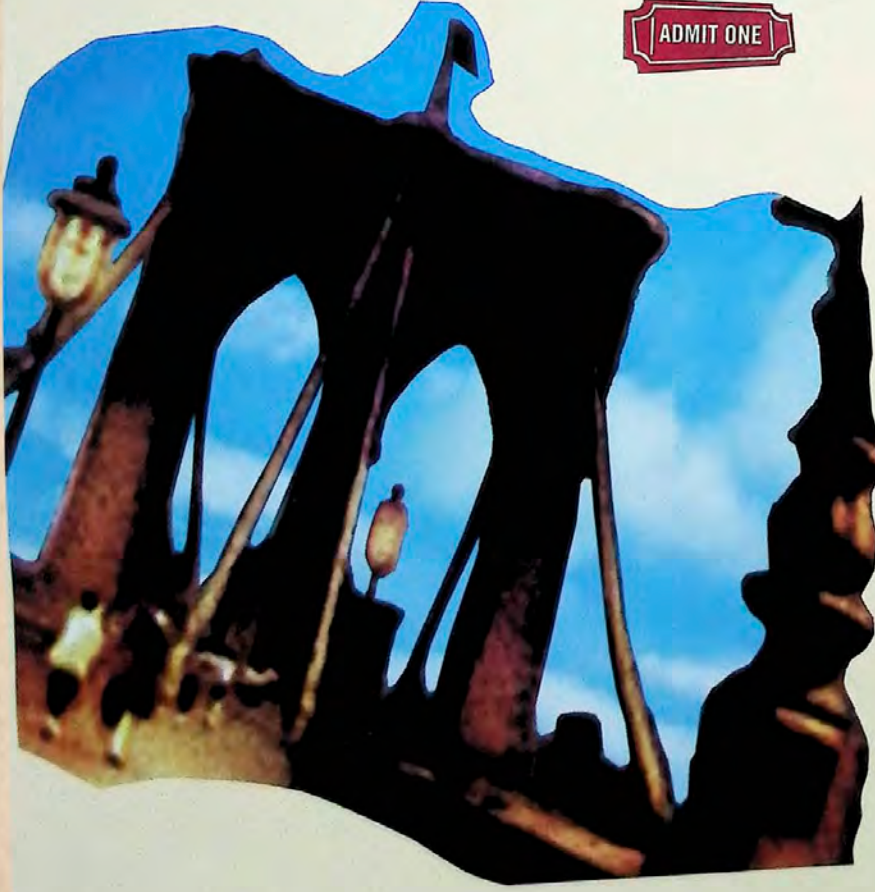
This is a beautifully written family drama. Shows how four generations of Italian American women deal with crisis. The women gather in the kitchen of the D'Angela's Brooklyn home while the dying family patriarch is in the downstairs bedroom playing Caruso records.

BOTTG HAS ANOTHER WINNER
 By Carla Gallagher, Who's On First

Imagine being a fly on the wall in an old Brooklyn family kitchen. Mama is cooking as family members gather together. You have set the scene for "Daughters" by John Morgan Evans as the Arty-award winning BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP begins its 2009 Fall Session. This is a poignant comedy of four generations women in an Italian-American kitchen in Brooklyn dealing with family tragedies. The cast of five women bring back memories of many family gatherings. CAROLYN KRAETSCH is quite the scene stealer even though she never says a word. COLLEEN WALSH has graced our local stage several times and doesn't let us down. NATALIE RAPP makes her premiere performance in the roll of Patty Ann and does a fine job. REBEKAH VEGA stepped in to the cast late, but you would never know it by her performance. JEAN BARNHART won an ARTY nomination for her last performance with BOTTG and aptly reminds us of all the "Mamas" we have known. The cast takes you to tears and laughter as they weave their tale of strong Italian women each finding in her own way... Life is what you make it. Even the prop manager got applause on opening night as she moved about the set as if choreographed to the music. PAUL ZILL has given us a set that takes us all back to the spacious kitchens of our childhoods where everyone gathered. CASY CANN has given us a great presentation that makes us feel like we are sitting at that table and part of the family.

COME EXPERIENCE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE ARTS
 When you come to a Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production, not only do the tireless volunteers appreciate your support, but with your presence, you are recognizing how essential the arts are to the vitality of our community and our quality of life. The performing arts expand our creativity, build social bonds and provide us with pleasure and comfort.

- Dyanne Vojvoda, Publicity



ADMIT ONE

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

Daughters
 by John Morgan Evans
 directed by Casy Cann

Don't miss it! Last 2 weeks of performances:
 Friday Oct. 30 & Nov. 6, 8pm
 Saturday Oct. 31 & Nov. 7, 2pm
 Sunday Nov. 1, 4pm

General Admission: \$20
 Seniors (62+)/Students: \$12

Tickets sold at the door or Benicia Chamber of Commerce, 601 First St., Benicia

Reserved seating & discount (10 or more)
 tickets and info: 707.746.1269
 tickets available for "will call" online
 beniciatowntheatregroup.com

Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
 140 West J St.
 Benicia, CA 94510



BENICIA HERALD

Spotlight

'Tis the season

The Benicia Historical Society
and
Soroptimist International of Benicia
present
2009
Holiday
Parlor Tour
Saturday,
December 5, 2009
1:00—5:00 pm
Tickets: \$25



The tour includes Commencing Officer's Quarters
from 1:00-7:00 pm — an additional 2 hours to enjoy the holiday offerings!



TO BE JOLLY: Friday saw the holiday spirit kicking into high gear in Benicia with the lighting of the city Christmas tree (left) and the annual performance by Kris Kringle and the Mistletoes, highlighted by a visit from Santa himself (below) — along with a few elves. On Saturday, the Benicia Marina's 2009 Lighted Boat Parade saw Lacy Dolphin winning for Best Overall Decorations; the crew (bottom right) celebrated with Harbormaster Rhonda Inel. Carolers from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (below left), meanwhile, serenaded visitors at the newly restored Commandant's Quarters during the city Parlor Tour and posed behind General Ulysses S. Grant (right), portrayed by Jim Stevenson.



INSIDEBENICIA

Volume 5 Issue 2 • December 2009

Holiday Parlor Tour



Saturday, December 5, 2009

Presented by Benicia Historical Society
& Soroptimist International of Benicia

6 vintage homes decorated for the holidays plus
completely renovated Commanding Officer's Quarters

Self-guided tours 1pm-5pm for vintage homes
& Commanding Officer's Quarters

The Commanding Officer's Quarters will feature holiday items for sale
by local non-profits. Food & beverages available, open until 7pm.
Tickets on sale 11/1, \$25 per person. Tickets are limited; available at Benicia
Main Street Depot, Camellia Tea and Bookshop Benicia

For more info or ticket reservations call 707.745.3551

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Out and About



By Joey Baker
Photos by Peggy Fulton

This month we're all about the outdoors! Desperate to enjoy the last few moments of beautiful weather before the marine layer settles in and we're forced inside, Benicians flocked to the parks and waterfront to visit with friends, cruise the main drag, write in their journals, and bask in the sunshine. Others chose to catch the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of *Daughters*. All seem to be enjoying the quiet before the holiday storms. Whenever you are out and about, keep smiling because we might just stop and ask, "May we take your photo?"

1. Tom Malicki with *Daughters* Stage Manager Melissa Crismon
2. Theatergoers Ildiko Homer and Tom Orr at *Daughters*
3. Janet Leventhal attending the show with her son Jonny White and Corinne Cox
4. Enjoying halftime:
Kelsey Ruebel (12)
Garrett Hageman (5)
Clayton Hutcheson (14)
Caleb Ales (10)
Brock Ruebel (15) and Jaden Lane (14)
5. Say Cheese! Back row:
Lizze Bishop, Jennifer Judd, Janice Bross, Maria Sloane,
Front row: Kathy Myers, Des Jansson, Rene Stewart, Allison Seymour, Julie Seymour, Fandi Peters, and Kara Rydman
6. Henry Padilla looking for a new place to cast
7. Charlene Bekosics is Mary Poppins
8. Guitar solo Sean West with big fan Jamie Delaney
9. Tommasina Barton Writes in her journal
10. Ernie Holly with Gavin Sealise on her first visit to Benicia
11. Local Mixed Media Artists Lotti Marie Jenkins and Rob Jenkins with their dog Savannah
12. Roger Cone, Community Preservation Coordinator, cruises First Street in his 1955 Bel Air
13. Frederico and his 1941 Pontiac Silver Streak



Things to Do Places to Go People to See
Free WEEKENDER
 December 2009 Magazine

The Venetia Historical Society Connecting People with the Past
 & The Venetia Soroptimists
 Present
2009 Holiday Parlor Tour
Saturday, December 5, 2009
1:00 - 5:00 pm

Tickets \$25
 Ticket sales at:
 Bookshop Venetia, Camelia Tea Room
 Chamber of Commerce
 Venetia Main Street
 For more information call: 707-745-3551

Tour includes open house of
 Commanding Officer's Quarters
 from 1:00 - 7:00 pm -
 an additional 2 hours
 enjoy the holiday offerings!



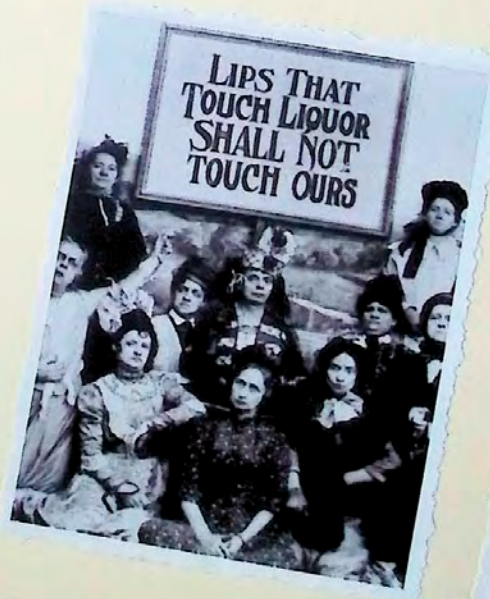

THERE'S NO BUSINESS
 LIKE **SHOW BUSINESS**



B.D.E.S. Building Restoration Fundraiser
March 13, 2010

**WINE TASTING
&
SILENT AUCTION**

Benicia Old Town Theatre group board members & volunteers came dressed to the nines in Prohibition Era costumes to pour wine for the event. The fundraiser was to restore the B.D.E.S. hall - the building we have come to love as our home since 1964!



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's Bawdy Musical Comedy The Great American Trailer Park Musical through May 15

Jeff Lowe, Production Director, Welcomes you to Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's most exclusive manufactured neighborhood. With Reber, who has developed a severe case of agoraphobia, Nolan Meacham, frustrated with living a wife who won't go outside even when tempted with Ice Capades tickets (can you believe it?), has taken to spending his nights at the local strip club, where he becomes smitten with exotic dancer Pippi (Rana Kangas-Kent). Pippi and Norbert discover a common bond when she vents out frustration about her profession. "Do you have any idea what it's like," she complains, "to take your living by collecting dollar bill after dollar bill after dollar bill?" — "Yes," he replies, "I'm a toll collector." But Pippi's ex-boyfriend Duke (Kalin Mitchell), aided by magic marker fumes, will go to any lengths to win her back. Every member of the cast has an opportunity to give a star performance. Steph Peek, Courtney McAllister and Sydnee Ortiz are positively outstanding as a musical troupe. Their neighbors who narrate the proceedings. Their harmonies (written by Lynne Smith) are tight, fluid and completely musical. The cast play all the extra characters — from strippers to food court employees. As the dim-witted one of the trio, Pickles (Ortiz) is a first-order clown with an endearingly flexible face. Lin (McAllister) throws out one-liners with Danny Carson-like precision ("My name's Lin. My real name's Linoleum 'cause my mother gave birth to me on the kitchen floor"); and Betty (Peck) has that warm, welcoming earth-mother quality with an extra shot of bawdiness. Paul Zill's set is appropriately loaded with tacky pink and blue pastels. Robin Banks' costume design is full of fun creations that are hilariously over the top; and choreographer Stacey Lowe moves the characters around the stage in perfect form with styles ranging from the 1940s to the disco era and beyond, culminating with the stirring (pun intended) "toilet brush" dance. Thankfully, the authors never look down on the characters. The trailer park folks may seem uneducated and a bit lazy at times, but they're depicted as generally sincere, lovable people.

or, I find myself happily reliving the days when I actually lived in a down in Brevard County, Florida. Some may call it a guilty pleasure. The Great American Trailer Park Musical is wrong, then I don't wanna miss the final two weeks! Tickets are available at the door, the Benicia Chamber of Commerce and online at beniciaoldtowntheatre.org. Benicia, 140 West J Street, Benicia. 18

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INSIDE BENICIA



the Willows production of the same play at this time last year, their infectious camaraderie performance, with a playful, friendly ambience that reaches beyond capacity crowd. A good time appeared to be had by all on opening night last Friday.



THEATER REVIEW
By Elizabeth Warnimont
Special to The Herald

Empty beer cans suspended from an oversized crescent wrench decorate the doorway at Jeanie and Norbert's trailer. A row of nylon-web aluminum folding chairs bakes in the sun in front of Betty's place. TV antennas tower on the neighbors' dotted roofs, and stuffed roadkill peppers the highway along the front. Welcome to Armadillo Acres, Florida, courtesy of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, bringing a slew of fun and laughs to the B.D.E.S. Hall this month in their production of Bay Area playwright Betsy Kelso's charming comedy, "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," directed by local talent Jeff Lowe.

Gifted cast, spirited show will delight audiences.

Steph Peek, Sydnee Ortiz and Courtney McAllister all shine in the anchoring roles of Betty, Pickles and Lin, respectively. The trio of tenured park residents provides narration and uncensored commentary as the quiet life at Armadillo Acres is shaken up by the arrival of traveling exotic dancer Pippi — a brassy, sassy character richly performed by Rana Kangas-Kent. Elizabeth Reger plays Jeanie, the agoraphobic mother who remembers the outside world as the place where her baby was stolen from her many years before. Reger's characterization is charming and endearing. Although her voice lacks projection in some scenes, she captures the tenderness and humor of the role.

Elizabeth Warnimont holds a BA in Germanic language and literature from the University of California-Santa Barbara. She is currently a substitute teacher for the Benicia Unified School District.

Nolan Meacham plays Jeanie's husband Norbert, who grows disenchanted when his wife shows no signs of breaking through her fear of man to embrace their upcoming anniversary. It doesn't help when he finds himself beguiled by the tall, blonde dancer who moves in next door. Meacham and Reger are in their vocal best in "Owner of My Heart," a tender interlude that breaks up the raunchy humor in the middle of Act One.

Meanwhile, Lin, played by McAllister, keeps her neighbors revving up the juke, burning lights and appliances at all hours so there won't be enough power for the county electric chair, thereby foiling the plans of the state to execute her imprisoned husband.

The gifted cast makes it all look easy, but a couple of the roles in "Trailer Park" present particular challenges. One is that of Pippi, who is called upon to portray a sultry, sophisticated adult dancer while at the same time fitting in with the juvenile, carefree atmosphere of the setting. Kent pulls it off supremely, performing the alluring acts at the graphically named strip club with graceful dexterity while maintaining the spirit of casual fun that permeates the rest of the show.

Another special challenge is the character of Duke, the jealous and violent boyfriend with a deadly combination of bad habits. Snuffing markers from one hand while brandishing a gun with the other, he must appear confident and ruthless, yet charming and hapless. He battles information out of a waitress while cracking wise, all the while scratching at his pasty white beer belly. Kalin Mitchell sails through the role with just the right level of humor, a subtle swagger and a comical bad-boy snarl.

Audiences will delight in the spirit of the show, enhanced by the quality costuming of Robin Banks and the colorful set designs of board president Paul Zill. Any lack of polish in the musical timing and vocal acuity is quickly forgiven in the midst of the hilarious antics performed by this group of dedicated, unified and enthusiastic players.

While inspired musicianship may have taken center stage in

The Benicia Herald

Benicia's best news source, now as always

BOTTG's 'Trailer Park' not the play next door

Leave a comment



THE CAST OF BOTTG'S "Great American Trailer Park Musical" from left, Elizabeth Reber, Nolan Meacham, Rana Kangas-Kent, Courtney McAllister, Sydnee Ortiz and Steph Peek. Courtesy Dyanne Vojvoda

Cast: Production has 'fun script,' challenging music

By Bethany A. Monk
Assistant Editor

"Fun" is the operative word here.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's spring musical, "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," is a "fun show" with a lot of heart, said actor Steph Peek, a Martinez resident and one of seven cast members in the production.

Peek plays Betty — or "Bad Ass Betty" — and said she's enjoying the "fabulous music and tight harmonies — we've been having a blast so far."

The play, directed by Vallejo resident Jeff Lowe, "is a comic fable about women in a Florida trailer park and their no-account men," the group's Web site states. The music and lyrics were written by David Nehls and Betsy Kelso.

For Rana Kangas-Kent, who plays Pippi, the music is both "complex and moving."

"It's a challenge for a classically trained singer like myself. I really have to dig deeper into myself as a performing artist," she said.

Pippi, she said, sings a lot of gospel blues. This comes from "a different place in my soul and a different place in my voice," said the Hercules resident.

The set for the musical is being built this week. Lowe said. There are several fantasy scenes in the play, and the set will encompass "all that we can fit," he said.

Lowe agreed the show's music is different than other musicals.

"In spite of the title, it has music that I would say is more difficult than I've heard in any musical," he said.

WHO'S ON FIRST

04-14-10

A GREAT PLAY AND THE BHS CAR SHOW!

By Carla Gallagher

PAUL ZILL has set yet another delightful scene for the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP. From the mud flaps, satellite dishes, and reflectors to a redneck wind chime Armadillo Acres comes alive as a well honed cast presents their kooky story through May 15 of "The Great American Trailer Park Musical". My prediction of an evening of LOL was not wasted. In the course of the evening this production covers: agoraphobia, adultery, 80's nostalgia, spray cheese, road kill, hysterical pregnancy, a broken electric chair, kleptomania, strippers, flim and disco. Bring tissue for the tears of laughter. STEPH PEEK, COURTNEY MC ALLISTER and SYDNEE ORTIZ are in perfect harmony in song and dance as they narrate us through this wacky tale with hysterical songs. RANA KANGAS-KENT explodes on to the stage as bawdy, flirtatious stripper with a way of moving on. Jeanie is played by ELIZABETH REGER, who's voice gets stronger and stronger as her character gets stronger. KATLIN MITCHELL as Duke plays the marker huffing jealous boyfriend of Pippi very well and left us roaringly laughing at the song "Road Kill". NOLAN MECHAM creates a Norbert torn between his love of Jeanie and Costco, his frustration with her agoraphobia, and the threads of Pippi. JEFF LOWE has done a great job of pulling this collection of characters together in a well trained finished performance. You will have fun, fun, fun till BOTTG takes this production away! I would not be surprised if this isn't held over due to demand so get your tickets now! Our local theatre group is in its 46th Season and that is due to the wonderful community support right here in Benicia! Friday and Saturday performances are at 8 PM (doors open at 7). Sunday performances are at 4 PM (doors open at 3). General admission is \$20. Seniors (\$2) and students with ID are \$18. Group tickets can be purchased in advance for groups of 10 or more at a discount. Tickets are available at the BENICIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE or reserved online at www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org

Benicia resident Lynne Smith, the show's musical director and vocal coach, said "Trailer Park" showcases "a nice complement of songs."

"Some (songs) are bluesy, some are ballads. Some are almost jazzy," Smith said.

"It's wonderful music. And by that I mean that it's upbeat and fun. The lyricists managed to put in 20 words where 10 fit," she said.

"It looks simple, but it's tough — it's a challenge."

But the actors are handling the challenge very well. Lowe said. "The people in the show are so incredibly talented."

If You Go

"The Great American Trailer Park Musical" runs from April 16 to May 15 at the historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., in Benicia. Tickets are \$18-\$20; opening night gala April 16 is \$25. Call 746-1269, or visit www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org for information.

Written by beniciaherald

April 2, 2010 at 12:46 am

Posted in [Features](#)

THEATRE Group PRESENTS

The GREAT AMERICAN Trailer Park MUSICAL

BOOK BY **BETSY KELSO**

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY **DAVID NEHLS**

DIRECTED BY **JEFF LOWE**

TICKETS & INFO
(707) 746-1269
B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J St.
Benicia

Tickets available for
"WILL CALL" Online
@ www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com
or Benicia Chamber of Commerce

Friday, Saturday 8pm
Sundays 4pm

April 16 - May 15



KIMBLE GOODMAN

Benicia man named to Civil Service Commission

Staff Report

Benicia resident Kimble Goodman on Tuesday was appointed by the Solano County Board of Supervisors to the county's Civil Service Commission representing the Second District.

He will fill the unexpired term previously held by Dan Healy, who stepped down upon his election as Solano County Superior Court Judge.

See Goodman, Page A3

GOODMAN

Continued from Page A1

Supervisor Linda Seifert, who represents the Second District, said, "Kimble Goodman will bring his quick analytical skills, a balanced perspective and an inclusive spirit to the Civil Service Commission."

The commission oversees the county's civil service system, ensuring that it operates according to established rules and regulations. Generally, the commission is responsible for the adoption and modification of civil service rules, the creation and modification of class specifications, and the hearing of appeals resulting from disciplinary actions or allegations of discrimination.

Goodman has served on Benicia's Economic Development Commission since January 2009 and currently is information officer for the Solano County Democratic Central Committee.

"I am pleased to serve at the request of Supervisor Seifert on the Civil Service Commission," Goodman said in a county news release. "The work of this commission is an important part of ensuring a good work environment and due process for county employees. This is especially important in today's economic downturn."

The commission meets at 6:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month in the Board of Supervisors' Chambers, 675 Texas St., Fairfield.



The show
WILL
go on

REPRESENTING the California State Automobile Association, Maria Staudbury, left, donated a \$500 check to Benicia Old Town Theatre Group to defray the cost of the musical scene and royalties for the spring 2012 production of "Reefers Madness: The Musical." Accepting on behalf of BOTTG was theater Secretary Cindy Smith. Inset: Volunteer Karen Ivant and BOTTG board members Rich Ivant, left, and Kimble Goodman accept a donation from Valero Refinery for "Reefers Madness" for \$1,000. Auditions for the show will be held in October; the show opens in April 2012. For more information visit beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com.



a&e

arts and entertainment

People

A JUDGE SENTENCED Michael Douglas' son on drug charges to five years in prison Tuesday, calling it his "last chance to make it."

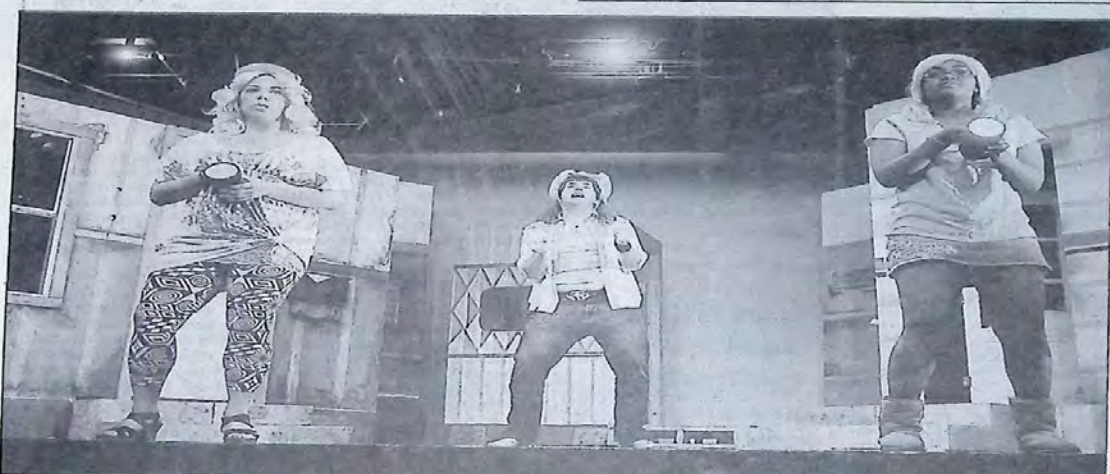
U.S. District Judge Richard M. Berman announced the sentence after hearing 31-year-old Cameron Douglas apologize with his father in court, admitting that he had squan-

dered a lot of opportunities to turn his life around.

The judge said he was not confident that Douglas would turn his back on drugs after pleading guilty in January to charges that he dealt large quantities of methamphetamine and cocaine.



DOUGLAS



Cast members perform a scene from "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," which is currently playing in Benicia.

LOL at BOTTG's 'Trailer Park' musical

BY TONY WADE
DAILY REPUBLIC
CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Great American Trailer Park Musical" is the answer to the question, "What would a musical about Jerry Springer's guests be like?"

The show managed to pull off the tricky feat of being low brow, profane and downright vulgar in spots and oddly charming in others.

The word that best describes the play is hilarious.

The story is basically about the residents of a seedy Florida trailer park named Armadillo Acres and what happens when the be-mullet-ed Norbert (Nolan Meckam) cheats on his agoraphobic wife Jeannie (Elizabeth Reber) with a stripper named Pippi (Rana Kangas-Kent).

The good: Director Jeff Lowe, coming off the success of Bay Area Stage's disturbingly brilliant "Buried Child," pulled together several diverse artists into a white trash extravaganza.

The three narrators/commentators, Betty (Steph Peck), Pickles (Sydney Ortiz) and Linoleum (Courtney McAllister), were individually and collectively hilarious.

Peck had the trailer ramp attitude, look and inflection down. McAllister brought spunk and powerhouse vocals. Ortiz? She's a sexy 18 and is crazy talented.

Kangas-Kent's strong voice was upstaged by her

Review

"The Great American Trailer Park Musical"
8 p.m. Friday, Saturday, April 30, May 1, May 7-8, and May 14-15
4 p.m. Sunday, May 2 and May 9
B.O.E.S. Hall, 140 W. J St., Benicia
\$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors, 62 and older, and students with valid identification
746-5526
<http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com>
★★★★ (out of four)

costumes. From a bare midriff pole dance outfit to a tiger print mini skirt to a red dress that threatened to have a Janet Jackson-esque wardrobe malfunction, Kangas-Kent brought sexy back to Benicia.

Reber, who was in her theatrical debut, did an incredible job. There was an instance where she missed a cue, but she more than made up for it with a blow-the-doors-off rendering of the song "Panic."

Kalin Mitchell was a scream as Pippi's gun toting, PAM huffin', magic marker sniffin' jealous boyfriend Duke. His first appearance in the play where he walked on in a half shirt with his belly exposed elicited, well, belly laughs.

The sets, by Paul Zill, were unbelievable. All the trappings of a stereotypical trailer park were present from the rusted-out manufactured homes themselves

to the satellite dishes and antennas on the roofs to the obligatory plastic pink flamingos.

Accessories like out-of-season Christmas lights and a wind chime made from empty beer cans hanging from a wrench added a special touch.

Costume Designer Robin Banks' list for the play probably said something like (1) trumpy (2) trashy (3) cleavage a plenty.

The narrators all had big, blonde wigs and wore enough blue eye shadow to make both the late Tammy Faye Bakker and Mimi Bobeck of "The Drew Carey Show" proud.

The choreography, by Stacey Loew, was sometimes sensual (Pippi's pole dance during "The Buck Stops Here") and wonderfully inventive and fun ("Flushed Down the Pipes" when the narrators danced with rubber gloves and toilet brushes).

Musical director Lynne Smith brought out the best in all the performers. The songs were clever and catchy, and it helped that the cast had several very strong singers (notably McAllister and Ortiz) who could pick up the slack of the less vocally gifted.

Standout tunes included the opener "This Side of the Tracks," "One Step Closer" and the disco-ish "Storms a-Brewin'."

The lighting design by Kelvin Doo and sound design by Larry Clark, Lowe and Smith coalesced perfectly.

Most of the songs had hilarious redneck twists to

them like the finale, which featured the great line, "I'm going to make like a nail and press on."

However, in the middle of the play a sweet and haunting duet called "Owner of My Heart" suddenly appeared. In the song, Norbert and Jeannie reassess their relationship, their voices if not their lives, in harmony.

THE NOT-SO-GOOD: While it was great that the show was so funny that people laughed long and hard, it might behoove the actors to wait a bit until the chuckles die down before moving on so audiences don't miss stuff that is even funnier.

THE DISCOUNT GOODS: During intermission, the audience was invited to peruse an actual garage sale in the back of the theater where nothing was more than \$10. The merchandise included LP records by Ted Nugent and April Wine as well as books such as "The Roadkill Cookbook" and "The Mullet: Hairstyle of the Gods."

THE BOTTOM LINE: There are more laughs in "The Great American Trailer Park Musical" than alligators in The Everglades and they came at the audience faster than most NASCAR races.

The only thing missing was something similar to the "Jer-ry! Jer-ry!" chants for the audience to show our approval. A standing ovation had to suffice.

Rebecca Fairfield freelance writer Tony Wade at rebeccafairfield.net

a&e

arts and entertainment

'Fences' is a must see for all

By TONY WADE
DAILY REPUBLIC
CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — The sublime production of "Fences" by Ivory Arts earlier this year brought director Terrence Tyrice Ivory's talents to Solano County. So it was with eager anticipation that I attended the opening night of Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning August Wilson play "Fences," which Ivory directed.

In addition to enjoying this wonderfully textured slice of community theater, I also had an opportunity to be a part of history.

According to the program, "Fences" is the 99th production BOTTG has put on since the troupe's start in 1964. In all that time, the only other play they produced with overt minority themes and characters was "Driving Miss Daisy."

To be sure, there are definitely cultural differences between "Fences" and say, Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." But that's what makes good theater so compelling — how universal human themes can cross boundaries of idiom, time, geography and circumstance.

"Fences" tells the story of a black family in the 1950s and the various trials it goes through.

Troy Maxson is an former Negro League baseball player who failed to make the major leagues and consequently carries bitterness around like luggage.

Troy works as a garbage man with his long-time friend Bono (pronounced like Cher's late ex-husband, not the U2 singer). Without revealing the specific twists and turns of the story, the play revolves around Troy's relationships with his sons, wife, friends, brother and the world at large. Bitterness, responsibility, and the need for unmet affection are some of the themes explored in "Fences."

The role of Troy demands a bigger-than-life character and Dennis McReynolds definitely fit the bill.

McReynolds breathed life into the complex character and succeeded in making him at turns pitiable, hilarious, loathsome and likable.

Lexi Hart played the role of Troy's longtime long-suffering wife Rose who stood by him with love and support until she no longer could.

Cory, Troy and Rose's teen-age son, was capably played by Erick Thompson. He captured quite nicely the confusion and anger caused by a resenting father who, while able to furnish material needs, seemed incapable of expressing love.

Eric Burns exploded onto the stage as Troy's brother Gabriel who, because of a severe head wound suffered in World War II, was mentally ill. While Gabriel's condition elicited sympathy, I couldn't help but laugh my fool head off at Burns' antics.

With one giant leg tucked in his sock and half his shirt stuck in his trousers, and with a trumpet strung around his neck, Troy's brother thought he was the archangel Gabriel. When he wasn't chasing women, he'd hound all over the stage he would follow the St. Peter in "Open the gates."

Angela 5-year-old

Review

"Fences"
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 29-30; 4 p.m. Sunday and Oct. 31
B.O.E.S. Hall, 140 W. J St.
\$20 adults, \$18 seniors (62 and older) and students with identification
746-1268
<http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com>
★★★★ (out of four)

Madison Green appears to be one of those "old souls" who seemingly pop up in children from time to time. She played the role of Troy's illegitimate daughter Raynell. That young Madison was so convincing and natural in even more amazing when you take into consideration she has had no formal training and that "Fences" is only her second production.

The set (created by Paul Zill) was basically a realistic porch with a tree in the front yard. The fence, constructed in stages throughout the play, wove the main theme throughout the scenes.

Sarah Elizabeth Whitten (stage manager), Kelvin Doo (lighting design), Larry Clark (sound design), and Carol Berman and Dyanne Vojvoda (costume design) together created a snapshot of a unique black experience in the 1950s.

The thought-provoking, entertaining, well-directed and well-acted "Fences" is a must see.

Rebecca Fairfield freelance writer Tony Wade at rebeccafairfield.net

Wilson's 'Fences' is Ivory's task at hand

By Rich Freedman
Theater critic

Some directors research a play by reading the original book, or catching a TV or motion picture version.

Terrence Ivory had slightly more insight into August Wilson, whose "Fences" Ivory directs for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

Ivory, a Granddaddy State University grad, attended a speech by Wilson at his alma mater, which produced Wilson's "Piano Lesson" and "Fences" that same year.

It was the first time "I read and witnessed the greatness of August Wilson," said Ivory, excited at the prospect of directing "Fences" that runs Oct. 15 through Nov. 6.

"Having taken a course by Lloyd Richards, who was not only the first African American to direct on Broadway, but directed numerous August Wilson plays, I was inspired and always wanted to share my vision of the work," Ivory said.

The challenge is conveying more than the obvious themes and emotions, such as intimacy, cycle of violence, verbal abuse, and male socialization, to name a few," said Ivory, a Fairfield resident.

The play, said Ivory, "is rich with black legends, storytelling, language, and life and symbolism. Also the play reveals a historical backdrop of the Negro Baseball League."

After interviewing for the directing job, BOTTG snagged Ivory for the assignment.

"I am honored and grateful to direct this work of art," he said, "thrilled that audience members should be awed from the moment they enter BDES Hall thanks to 'a stunning set' by Paul Zill."

"Then, the characters will emerge to tell a story and share a kaleidoscope of emotions and pain," Ivory said. "This play will appeal to the heart. You will laugh and cry with the characters."

Considering himself "a man of God, my touch is a blessing."

See Fences, 8B



Terrence Ivory

Oct. 15 through Nov. 6
The Benicia Old Town Theatre Guild presents
"Fences," by August Wilson, directed by Terrence Ivory, BDES Hall, 140 W. J. St., Benicia, General \$20, senior/student \$18, 746-1269.

Vallejoan recalls memories



The cast of 'Fences' prepare for opening night on Oct. 15 in Benicia.

Fences ...

Continued from 7B

direct reflection of the Holy Spirit working in me," Ivory said. "I partner with the Holy Spirit to discern the vision and visual composition. Also, my background, experience, education and passion contributes to my direction."

The cast, said Ivory, is "gifted,

hilarious, powerful."

"It's my hope that the universal themes will intersect all cultures and ethnicities," Ivory said. "Themes such as oppression, infidelity, family secrets and violence to name a few. Also, everyone should be able to relate to conflicts that place a wedge between the love we have for each other. Hopefully, this play will challenge all cultures to address any conflicts in their own families."

If you go

What: "Fences" by August Wilson, directed by Terrence Ivory
Where: BDES Hall, 140 W. J. St., Benicia
When: Oct. 15 through Nov. 6
Fridays through Sundays
Tickets/info: 746-1269, beniciaoldtowntheatre.org

Benicia High School holds costume sale

high school, 1100 Military West. for Halloween or to cost

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2010

BENICIA HERALD

A5

Spotlight

BOTTG builds strong 'Fences'

THEATER REVIEW BY JENNIFER HACHIMAN
Special to The Herald

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest offering provides laughs along with the heartbreaking drama that family strife can bring. The classic story of August Wilson's "Fences" is made even better by a great cast, well-designed set and good directing — in short, it's a great night out.

While it focuses on the changes occurring in African-American identity during the turbulent 1950s, "Fences" also investigates themes that transcend time or place: paternal hopes and fears, love, pride, and the battle between individual responsibility and personal gratification. The play's title refers to the barriers in place for African Americans during that time of great social upheaval, but it also reflects the barriers that the main character, Troy, erects between himself and the people he loves — a theme that can be appreciated across the cultural divide.

"Fences" was one in a series of 10 plays written across the course of Wilson's life, sometimes called "The Pittsburgh Cycle" — the playwright was from Pittsburgh and all his plays are set there. Each is a portrait of the African-American experience in a different decade of the 20th century.

Set in 1957 in the Pittsburgh slums, "Fences" centers on the family of Troy Maxson, an illiterate garbage man, ex-conv, son of a sharecropper, and former Negro League baseball player. Troy is a hard-working man whose self-worth is strongly tied to his role as absolute head of household. His pride as head of the family and wage earner is all he has to show for years of hard labor and disappointment.

Jennifer Hachiman is a Benicia resident. She holds a BA in theater and English from the University of Mississippi.



"FENCES" is playing at Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's B.D.E.S. Hall through Nov. 6. Above, Erick Thompson as Cory and Madison Green, 8, as Raynell. Below, Hosea Morgan, left, as Lyons and Eric Burns as Gabriel.

Troy is a challenging role and he is ably portrayed by Dennis McReynolds. On opening night last week I found McReynolds a bit hard to follow at times because of his tendency to speak quickly, but this diminished as the play progressed. He was most powerful when he slowed the lines and gave free rein to his rich, resonant voice. His performance was reminiscent of James Earl Jones, who originated the role on Broadway in 1987.

Troy's powerful presence makes him loved by many and he loves them in return, but his need to believe that his choices are always right, even when they are made for selfish reasons, means he is not much influenced by others. As he says in the second act, "I'm not ashamed — it was in my heart and my heart tells me what's right and wrong every time."

Rose, Troy's wife of 18 years, chooses



to allow Troy supremacy while subtly trying to moderate his choices, especially when it comes to interactions with his sons, Cory and Lyons. Rose is played by Lexi Hart with a sweetness that demon-

strates her belief in and love for her spouse. Although Hart started a bit stiffly, she quickly fell into the role and was superb in the second act, when Rose begins to come fully into a sense of her own power and identity and gives free rein to her anger and disillusionment over her disappointing marriage.

Bono, Troy's best friend and fellow garbage collector, idealizes Troy and supports his self-image until Troy's selfish actions finally push him off his pedestal. Bono is played with great natural warmth and good humor by Lamont Young. Troy's sons, Cory and Lyons, are so separated in age and experience as to be almost from two generations: Lyons, played by Hosea Morgan, is the product of

and a teenage relationship and was essentially abandoned when his father was sent to prison not long after his birth. He is therefore little influenced by Troy's worldview.

Cory, on the other hand, is the only child of a late marriage and has had the full advantages — and disadvantages — of being the son of such a stubborn and strong-willed man. While Troy cares for Cory, he is also terrified that his son will suffer the same disappointments that he did and is determined to prevent them. It is also clear in his treatment of Cory, played by Erick Thompson, that he considers him to be completely under his authority and will brook no interference or dissent when it comes to his future, even from his wife and his best friend. Thompson nicely transitions over the course of the play from a promising young football jock with a puppy-like energy to a sober, reflective military man.

Troy also has a brother, Gabriel, played with immense energy and an engaging childlike quality by Eric Burns. Gabriel's head wound suffered in World War II allows Troy to own a home that he

If You Go

"Fences" continues at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall in downtown Benicia through Nov. 6. For ticket information see www.beniciaoldtowntheatre.org or call 707-746-1269. *

otherwise would never have been able to — a fact over which Troy is alternately guilty, grateful, and bitter. The cast is rounded out by Madison Green, a charming 8-year-old who only began acting this year. Ms. Green plays Raynell, Troy's third child, and is a natural to the stage.

Director Terrence Ivory, a professor at Contra Costa College, keeps the action flowing nicely in "Fences," helped immensely by Paul Zill's stagecraft. Zill, BOTTG's longtime (and Arty Award-winning) set designer, knows how best to use the limited space at the B.D.E.S. Hall. Period costuming by Carol Berman and

Dyanne Vojvoda also boosts "Fences," providing the kind of detail — including vintage football attire for Cory and seven or eight outfits for Lyons, a musician in a jazz club — that transport an audience instantly to a time and place. The shoes,

hats, pleated trousers, vests, and brightly patterned blazers were perfect; I don't believe Lyons ever entered the set in the same outfit, fitting for a man who cared more about his appearance than his personal integrity and the woman he loves. And where would the production be without a little aural assistance? Sound designer Larry Clark provided great selections of period jazz and blues to help set the scene.

All in all, BOTTG has done justice to a great script that leaves the audience little doubt over why it won the 1987 Tony award for "Best Play." I left feeling it was a night well-spent and was still talking about the characters over morning coffee.

Next up, BOTTG will present "The Nerd," a comedy about a friend who comes to visit and overstays his welcome with a vengeance, in spring 2011.

Themes of family struggle faced in all cultures.



AUGUST WILSON'S FENCES

Directed by Terrence Tyrie Ivory

**Oct. 15
THRU
Nov. 6**

**Friday
&
Saturday
8 pm.**

**Sunday
Matinees
4 pm.**

Located at
B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J. Street
Benicia

**Tickets & Info
707 746-1269**

**presented by
Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group**

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize
"Fences has a scope and impact far bigger
than that of a simple family drama".

**Fences depicts the quiet
collapse of an ordinary
African American family
in the late 1950's**

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ditor

I am writing as the current President of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group to citizens of Benicia to come and experience our latest offering, August Wilson's Pulitzer winning play, FENCES.

After a group of our Board members viewed this wonderful work at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2008, we knew we had to bring it to our stage and share it with Benicia. This story of an African American family in Pittsburgh, Pa., in the 1950s is a story of humor, pathos, love and disappointment. As it recounts the struggles of an ordinary family, as framed by the inherent racism of the times, it is at its heart a classic American story. We at the BOTTG believe this is a tale that needs to be seen by everyone, that is among the best offered by modern theater, and highly recommend it for adult and teens as a moving family drama with lessons for all.

Our talented and hardworking cast has outdone itself night after night to bring life to these masterpieces. They have received standing ovations at almost every performance, and have already had a number of audience members returning for a second viewing. FENCES is the 99th show BOTTG has brought to our citizens in 46 years, and one of the best we don't miss this show!

Thru Nov. 6th at the BDES Hall, 140 West J Street. Call 746-1269 or online at oldtowntheatre.com.

Dan Clark

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2010

HERALD PRINT
EXCLUSIVE

The A Cappella



Handyman
Peter Bray
columnist

'Fences' and more

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group opened its fall 2010 season last week with the Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "Fences." Gotta go see it! The play was a knockout performance by all cast and supporting staff members, with another outstanding set design/construction by Paul Zill and his team of creative wizards.

Way to go! Dennis McReynolds as Troy will impress, dazzle, and keep you hooting and hollering at his total command of stage presence, depth of feeling and personality nuances. He mesmerizes with flawless dialogue and pacing in his portrayal as husband, father, friend, brother, and more ...

Lexi Hart as Rose, Troy's ever-supporting wife, doesn't miss a beat from excellence either — standing with and up to him forever.

All cast members make up Troy and Rose's family and make this an entertaining and awe-inspiring performance. No wonder the play won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize. The metaphor of "fences" throughout the show is classic ... Direction by Terrence T. Ivory.

Show details and times at www.beniciakidstheatre.org.

Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group PRESENTS August Wilson's FENCES

Trick Thompson as Cory Maxson

Lamont Young as Jim Bono

Dennis McReynolds as Troy Maxson

Lexi Hart as Rose

Madison Green as Raynell Maxson

October 15 - November 6 2010

DIRECTED BY Terrence Tyrie Ivory

PHOTOGRAPHY Messina

Cast Portraits Donated by Joe Messina



BENICIA HERALD

100th Year • No. 135

beniciaherald.wordpress.com

Always 50¢

Breaking down walls with 'Fences'



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group performance emphasizes universal themes

By BETTANY A. MONK
Assistant Editor

On the surface, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's upcoming production of "Fences" is about the struggle and strife of the African-American experience in 1950s America.

But after seeing the play, which opens Friday, "you see that it's a play that emphasizes love, peace and patience," said cast member Lamont Young. "These are the undertones we're trying to get people to latch on to."

Penned by late American playwright See Fences, Page A3

FENCES

Continued from Page A1

August Wilson in 1983, "Fences" earned a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It tells the story of one Pittsburgh family's pre-civil-rights-movement trials and tribulations.

BOTIG's production runs through Nov. 6.

The play comprises a seven-member cast, said director Terrence Tyrie Ivory, and there's an almost necessary focus on the ensemble's chemistry. He said he was fortunate to have such a "talented, intelligent, giving cast. You have a cast that comes in with a great deal of cohesiveness — a cast who gets along."

The actors, Ivory said, handled the script with much care and thoughtfulness.

"The play is so rich with universal themes and conflicts," he said. "We worked very hard to bring forth so many universal themes ... through to the audience."

TO WATCH

"Fences" runs through Nov. 6 at the Historic B.D. Hall, 149 West 1 St., in Benicia. Shows begin at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, and 4 p.m. on Sundays. Tickets are \$20 for general admission and \$18 for seniors and students. Friday's Opening Night Gala costs \$25 per person and includes the show and champagne gala. On Sunday, Oct. 17, students can see the show for \$9. For tickets or more information, call 746-1269 or visit www.beniciatowntheatregroup.com.

The play's main — and most tragic — character, Troy Maxson, played by Dennis McReynolds, is no stranger to hardship. In light of the changing times, Troy finds himself dealing with a shifting world of uncertainties and cultural pitfalls.

Lamont Young's character, Bono, starts off as an admirer of Troy's. Later, Young said, "(Bono) becomes kind of an anchor for his conscience."

Though the play focuses on one family, it is a play for people of all walks of life, said cast member Eric Burns, who plays Gabriel. "These themes are universal — they can happen in any other ethnic group." The family play is heavy with serious themes such as betrayal, but at the same time is child-friendly, he said.

"I believe (Wilson) wrote it to encompass the entire family. There's nothing parents should be afraid of" and no offensive language, Burns said. "I wouldn't have a problem with my children seeing it."

Children are even a part of the cast: Nine-year-old Madison Green plays Raynell. "I really like being out (on stage) with all the older people," Madison said. Her favorite part is the scene in which she sings the song, "Here I Ring."

Hoven Morgan, who plays Lyons, said he couldn't pass up the opportunity to work with Ivory. "It's been such a learning experience, the things he's teaching me," Morgan said. "I've grown tremendously" as an actor.

"I'm no longer the weakest link," added with a chuckle.

For cast member Erick Thompson, who plays Cory, performing in an August Wilson play is "an honor."

"(Wilson's) work is admired through the theater world," he said.

Working on "Fences" has been a "learning" experience, said a graduate of Solano Community College theater program, he's been in several plays and only "working with a wonderful cast, a wonderful director" in "Fences."

Thompson said he has learned to himself as an actor — and to trust his instincts. "It's not like painting a picture," he said.

"In this art form, you are the canvas," said BOTIG publicist Dyan Vajveda.

"Everyone has contributed so much to make this production a treasured experience."

The Matinee showing of August Wilson's *Fences* fell on the twenty fourth, the day after the Giants won the pennant, when many folks throughout the Bay Area were doubtless recuperating from revelries induced by that historic victory. In spite of this, and the inclement weather, a sizable crowd—including Mayor Elizabeth Patterson, School Board member Dana Dean and Congressman George Miller—turned out to see a production more seriously concerned with baseball, redemption, race, and other themes central to American life.

The late August Wilson play premiered in 1985, and won its already distinguished author the first of two Pulitzers. The play is part of the The Pittsburgh Cycle, a series of ten plays, each one examining a different decade of the twentieth century through the prism of Pittsburgh's Hill District and its African American population. *Fences* takes place in the transitional, iconic 1950's, and director Terrence Tyrie Ivory does a fine job of capturing that decade's flavor without making ostentatious efforts to make it a period piece.

Fences tells the story of the Maxson family, with the spotlight unblinkingly set on its patriarch, Troy, a sanitation worker and father of two in his mid-fifties. The play opens on a Friday evening as Troy and his friend Bono are making the jolly walk to Troy's house, where the two will begin the witticism and whisky-powered brand of jocular time killing that both have obviously observed for decades. In a way neither forced nor cursory, the two friends' banter manages to highlight many of the issues to come: Troy resents the segregated nature of his job, mocks the overly-hyped stats of baseball stars black and white, and gets a disquieting tinkle in his eye as he discusses an Alabama girl with "hips wide as the Mississippi River." Though hardship and

Benicia Magazine | Local Production of "Fences" Knocks It Out of L...

www.beniciamagazine.com/core/pagetools.php?pageid=1191

tragedy will make their violent appearances, much of the play's action occurs during these moments of ease which, as the play goes on, become harder for Troy to sustain.

Troy's home is a small but comfortable row-house. It has a well-worn stoop, a roof that wants tarring, and the eponymous fence, a skeletal, wobbly thing that one might generously describe as a work in progress. Beyond the fence stands a tree from which a practice baseball dangles ominously, an ever-present temptation for Troy to lapse into the heady mix of nostalgia and bitterness with which he views life as he recalls his own former prowess on the diamond. The set designers did a commendable job of creating an environment that both radiates human warmth and eerily suggests the sadness to come.

Troy shares his home with his grateful, forgiving, young wife Rose and their only child Cory, a hardworking high school student, promising football player, and almost cripplingly dutiful son to Troy, who has little faith in sports to better the lives of black people. Soon into the first act, we find that football recruiters see much potential in Cory, and Cory, despite his position at the A&P where he works to help his family, is giving serious consideration to their offer. The frictions arising from this ambition are one of the main strands in the plot.

In addition to the three Maxsons, two supporting roles enliven the production. One is Lyons, Troy's son from an earlier relationship. Lyons is moody in his thirties with avowed musical interests and a magnetic pull towards his father's paycheck; Troy seems not to mind his son's solicitations, as they give him a chance to spill out some of his choice insults (e.g. "I'll go to hell and play blackjack with the devil before I give you ten dollars.") And then there's Troy's brother, Gabe, a self-proclaimed vegetable salesman who received a war wound that left him mentally unstable. Gabe claims to have visited heaven, he carries a bugle to alert the angels, and he speaks like a man who swallowed a full-volume car radio tuned to a loony AM station. He's a wild presence, but like the Fool in King Lear, Gabe is a character whose apparent ramblings contain much prophetic and poetic power. To Troy's shame, Gabe is also the funnel through which government subsidies reach Troy's house, another plot point that will guide the events to follow. Of all the roles, Gabe's has the most showboating, and Eric Burnes carries off the role with brio and manic energy.

Troy is the center of the play, the proud, angry planet around which all smaller personalities orbit. Wilson's stage directions stipulate that Troy's physical largeness be one of his defining qualities, and he carries himself as a man conditionally unfit for a place in life's background. A marvelous talker, Troy is equal parts fibbing blowhard and street-smart pundit. Initially I thought Dennis McReynolds' performance too given to hammy gestures and histrionics, but as the time went on it became clear that such gestures would come naturally to Troy, a man who's become too enamored with acting out different parts before different people...especially before a certain shapely gal from Alabama. McReynolds pulls off a strong performance, making Troy both larger than life and wincingly human.

Troy is also the lens through which we view the play's most significant missing character, Troy's father, a loveless, humorless sharecropper whose behavior spurned Troy to leave the South at 14. His father's legacy is a dark one that colors Troy's own parenting ways: in Cory, Troy finds the one person in whom he can find his overbearing sense of authority recognized, the only man who will call him, "sir," in earnest. When Cory begins to assert his own interests, and vie for genuine familial love, Troy shows that the sins of the father do hard.

Fences is Wilson's most famous play, and it is, for political reasons along with legitimate ones, a standard text in college and secondary literature and theater curricula. This makes sense, as the play is positively teeming with discussion-ready themes: mortality, infidelity, social mobility, race relations, the possibilities and perils of self-reinvention. But while these themes and a few obscure passages leave plenty room for scholarly interpretations, *Fences*, and this production, is also a work of genuine entertainment, chock-a-block with tureful, realistic dialogue, humorous anecdotes (including a killer joke about an impossibly over-financed couch), and gripping human drama. The most sympathetic (and perhaps hardest to play) figure might be Rose. She doesn't get many monologues or saucy one-liners, but she carries herself with fierce dignity, and most of the audience's audible sighs, teary gulps, and words of encouragement followed actress Lexi Hart's excellently delivered lines. The palpable level of connection the audience toward Hart was, in itself, worth the price of admission.

It's also worth noting that *Fences* is Benicia Old Town Playhouse's ninety-ninth production. If the plays to come are equally good, then there will be many more plays indeed.

2 of 3

10/28/10 10:05



The Benicia Herald

Benicia's best news source, now as always

'Nerd': Benicia troupe once again delivers the goods

Benicia Herald



THE CAST OF "The Nerd," back row: Sean Beecroft (the Nerd), Peter DelFiorentino (the Theater Critic), Leon Goertzen (Willum), Natalie Rapp (Tansy). Front row: Chuck Schilling (the Boss), Nathaniel Correll (his Son), and Karyn Knowles (the School Teacher). The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production runs through May 14.

Dyanne Vojvoda photos

By David Ryan Palmer
Assistant Editor

If you base the success of a comedy on how much the audience laughs — and especially on how much the reviewer in the audience laughs — then "The Nerd," written by playwright Larry Shue in 1981 and staged this spring by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, is a rousing, smash hit.

BOTTG's latest production, directed by alum Clinton Vidal, had a few missteps on opening night Friday. But none were enough to mar an evening of wit and hilarity. Simply put, if you like to laugh, this is a must-see show.

The play is so funny, in fact, you forget yourself while watching it. It helps that the characters manage to be familiar archetypes without becoming clichés — a fact for which all credit must be given the talented cast.

Take Willum Cubbert, played by Actors Equity member Leon Goertzen in his first BOTTG production. Willum is an architect in Terre Haute, Ind., in 1979. He's not a very exciting guy — in fact he's kind of a doormat, confident enough in his abilities but easily pushed around by his client, hotel owner Wamock Waldgrave, played by Chuck Schilling; by his friend Axel Hammond, played delightfully by Peter DelFiorentino; and by his girlfriend, Tansy McGuinness, played by Natalie Rapp. With friends like these ...

Willum also gets pushed around by the titular Nerd himself, Rick Steadman, played to absolute perfection by Sean Beecroft.

Beecroft's shiny bald head, nasally voice, horrible laugh and horrible personal habits don't really jibe with the modern understanding of a "nerd." He's not the kind of socially withdrawn math whiz people often think of as a nerd today. Instead, Steadman is a social boor, a man who feels confident that he's loved and respected even as he openly insults the guests in Willum's home.

The Nerd thinks of himself as the pinnacle of social grace even as his shirt sticks prominently out of his zipper. What do you do with someone like this? Thus we see Willum's dilemma.

The story begins when Willum is set to have his latest client, Waldgrave, his wife Clelia (played by Karyn Knowles in her first comedy role) and son Thor (played by 10-year-old Nathaniel Correll) over for a dinner party. Waldgrave's got his own problems, particularly the fact that his son is a spoiled brat — partly because Clelia is too permissive and partly because Waldgrave would rather give the kid money to behave than resort to any kind of discipline. Clelia, a harried school teacher, herself has rather strange stress-relieving habits: Never have I heard a broken cup elicit quite that kind of audible reaction.

Then Rick arrives. Oh, does he arrive. The man has a special quality: He instantly takes everyone out of their comfort zone. His social awkwardness and lack of perception heightens everyone else's character traits: Willum gets walked on even more, Axel becomes even snarkier, Thor is even more of a brat, Clelia is stressed to the max, Waldgrave gets angrier and angrier, and Tansy is pushed into a traditional role into which she does not fit very well, to say the least. Rick's presence subverts expectations, and that's the point: The play's chief goal is to take the audience's expectations and put them on their head.

That includes an ending that is such a delightful surprise, you'll be caught completely off guard.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group PRESENTS

The NERD

BY LARRY SHUE

"...the audience almost never stops laughing..." — Variety

"...a tonic of bruising laughter..." — Milwaukee Journal

Directed by Clinton Vidal

April 22 THRU May 14

Friday & Saturday 8 pm.

Sunday Matinees *NEW TIME* 2 pm.

Located at B.D.E.S. Hall 140 West J. Street Benicia

Tickets & Info 707.746.1269

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

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LEON GOERTZEN (Willum) and Natalie Rapp (Tansy).

The main reason for the ending having the impact it does: the play's shining star, Peter DelFiorentino. Where Goertzen's Willum is the straight man protagonist and Rapp's Tansy is the 80s-fashionable heroine (BOTTG's costuming really hits the mark), it's DelFiorentino's wild-card portrayal of Axel Hammond, a drama critic after my own heart, that makes everything work.

DelFiorentino gets some of the best lines in the play: Whenever Axel makes an aside or a snide remark to one of the other players, you can't help but chuckle. He has so many tricks up his sleeve it would take an over-the-top performance to really capture the character — and congrats to us, that's what we get.

DelFiorentino's bio in the playbill mentions his previous role in a production of Mel Brooks's "The Producers," and it's easy to see some of Max Bialystock in Axel, a shrewd, inventive, absolutely adorable liar and cheat. He may not be as ruthlessly self-interested as Bialystock, but he's just as entertaining. I'd love to see a version of Brooks's masterpiece with DelFiorentino as Bialystock and Goertzen as Leo Bloom.

There were, of course, a few missteps in BOTTG's opening night performance. Portions of the show where characters listen in on Willum's home phone — a scene involving an '80s-style answering machine — were difficult to hear: The audience had trouble understanding what someone was saying through the playback. In other places a few players dropped lines and missed cues, resulting in a bit of hurried improvisation.

But you only notice these things because of how good the rest of the show is. Long after I'd left the theater I was thinking back to the show and chuckling at some antic of the Nerd, some aside by DelFiorentino or Goertzen's funniest moment, involving a silver platter and an apple core.

"The Nerd" came together nicely and after a slightly shaky opening night can only improve. It is showing through mid-May. See it. You will not be disappointed.

If You Go

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's "The Nerd" will be performed Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., through May 14. Visit beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com or call 707-746-1269 for tickets and other information.

The Nerd gets some love
By Amy Maginn-Hickey
April 22nd, 2012

Clayton Vidal has a disclaimer to share.

"This is not my life story," he said, in reference to the play, "The Nerd."

Vidal is directing the production for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Guild. And, as a member of the guild's planning committee, he had a say in the choice of production.

"We all loved it," Vidal said of the selection. "It's such a funny play."

The story focuses on how a guy who likes to get along with everyone.

"He could just a little more gung-ho," Vidal said.

Enter an unlikely guest who manages to ruin pretty much everything while inserting himself into every aspect of the nice guy's life. A plan is hatched to make the unwanted guest feel less welcome.

Vidal is returning to the director's chair for the first time in years. And, he lives being there again, he said.

As for how he defines a nerd, Vidal listed many traits, including one who excels in math and lives in a world of chess.

"In my experience, the top kids were Air Jordans," he said. "The nerds were kind shoes, were near-sighted or far-sighted and were not the most handsome. With the onset of computers they gravitated toward computer science."

"They are not too concerned with looking hip. While everyone else was talking about pop culture, nerds would tell you the history of checkers and how it mirrors life."

The cast includes: Leon Guertzo, Natalie Flapp, Peter Del Fiorentino, Chuck Schilling, Karyn Knowles, Nathaniel Carroll and Rick, Sean Boerscott.

The cast includes: Leon Guertzo, Natalie Flapp, Peter Del Fiorentino, Chuck Schilling, Karyn Knowles, Nathaniel Carroll and Rick, Sean Boerscott.

"I hope the audience enjoys it as much as we have enjoyed putting it together," Vidal said. "I look forward to sitting in the back of the house and watching people enjoy it."

Contact Amy Maginn-Hickey at amaginn@dailyrepublic.net or 427-6927.

Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group

THE NERD

Fri Sat & Sun April 22 thru May 14
Fri & Sat 8:00 p.m. Sun 2:00 p.m.
Admission: \$20.00 General/\$18.00 seniors/students

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Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group

THE NERD

Fri Sat & Sun April 22 thru May 14
Fri & Sat 8:00 p.m. Sun 2:00 p.m.
Admission: \$20.00 General/\$18.00 seniors/students

962820

Benicia Patch 52
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Arts, Opinion, The Neighborhood Files, Volunteers in the News
BOTTG Delivers Laughs in Latest Production
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group continues its 47th Season with the wild, whacky, and zany comedy romp "The Nerd."
By Carline Gouy | Email the author | 5:00pm



One might ask just what was playwright, Larry Shue, thinking or drinking when he penned the comedy, "The Nerd," Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest production.

Set in 1970, the action centers around the seething under-belly of Taro Haute, Indiana, a land of mauling pigs, apple core rituals, and delicacies consisting of warm water and cottage cheese.

Yes, it's true, the audience at Friday night's opening performance of "The Nerd" never dreamt that once they entered the Disney-like diorama of dysfunction, (the living room of architect Wilbur Cubbert), their lives would be forever altered. But, one thing's for certain, Pee-wee's Playhouse has nothing on the colorfully cock-eyed set cleverly created by Set Designer, Paul Zill, and Chief Scenic Designer Painter, Beate Bruhl.

The cast came fully equipped with 'nerdy' tendencies at their own. Under the skillful direction of Clinton Vidal (or perhaps it was his psychiatric counseling), he was able to focus this mismatched menagerie of miscreants and their obnoxious, unrelenting, vacuous, and hilarious high-jinx, and we, last night's audience, were the lucky recipients. Yes, the over-flowing audience roared, howled, hooted, back-slapped, knee-slapped, hand-clapped, and a few nearly fell off their chairs (I should know, I was one of them).

While few and far between, here are some of the things that didn't work as well as they might have. The messages from the telephone answering machine (which could also be considered one of the play's characters) were too muffled for most to fully understand, especially in the first act and at times the set's furniture placement caused slight-line issues.

Overall, the acting was stellar with only a few hiccups; after all, this is live theatre. And, considering this is a show heavy on timing, props, and sight gags, delivery is everything. And, to that end, everything was more than fine, especially in the very capable hands of award winning actor, Peter Del Fiorentino, who plays Wilbur Cubbert's stand and Taro Haute culture critic par excellence, Axel Hammond, and Natalie Flapp who plays, Tanya McGuinness, Cubbert's long-suffering girlfriend and aspiring meteorologist.

Kudos also go out to the self-proclaimed nerd (he actually describes himself a walking/talking nerd in his program bio) Sean Boerscott (Rick Stoodman). The rest of the empty talented cast that rounds out the show: Leon Guertzo (Wilbur Cubbert), Chuck Schilling (Wormack Waggoner), Karyn Knowles (Clara Waggoner), and Nathaniel Barrett (Cordell Waggoner).

So, what are you thinking? Where will you be before the end of the 4 week run of BOTTG's current comedy production? Hopefully, you will be in the audience to enjoy what is one of the funniest shows this side of the Benicia Bridge. Congratulations BOTTG and Keep Up the GREAT WORK!

Overall a very strong 3 out of 4 stars!!

Thank you also like to thank BOTTG for its complimentary ticket to this event.

Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group

PLAYBILL Since 1964

Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group PRESENTS

The NERD

BY LARRY SHUE

"...the audience almost never stops laughing..."
- Variety.

April 22 THRU May 14

Friday & Saturday 8 pm.

Sunday Matinees NEW TIME* 2 pm.

Located at
D.E.S. Hall
140 West J. Street
Benicia

Tickets & Info
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People

ae arts and entertainment

A little 1970s nerd gets right back in town

By Tom Ward
and Benicia Patch

When a young man named Benicia Patch... (text continues)

Review

Benicia Patch

Benicia Patch

Benicia Patch



Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group
PRESENTS

The NERD

BY LARRY SHUE

April 22
THRU
May 14
2011

Mr. Walcott (Chuck Schlimm)

Rick (Sean Beecroft)

Jansy (Natalie Rapp)

Axel (Peter de Lorenzo)

Thomas (Nathaniel Correll)

Wendy (Katie Gortvash)

Directed by
Clinton Vidal

Cast Portraits
Donated by
Joe Messina

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group
PRESENTS

The NERD

BY LARRY SHUE

"...the audience almost
never stops laughing..."
- Variety

...lots of side-
tracking laughter...
- Worcester Telegram

Directed by
Clinton Vidal

April 22
THRU
May 14

Friday
&
Saturday
8 pm.
Sunday
Matinees
"NEW TIME"
2 pm.

Located at
B.O.T.S. Hall
140 West J. Street
Benicia

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Benicia Old Town THEATRE Group PRESENTS

The Voice of the Prairie

by John Olive

directed by Casy Cann

Oct. 21 THRU Nov. 12
Friday & Saturday 8 pm.
Sunday Matinees 2 pm.
NEW TIME
 Located at B.D.E.S. Hall 140 West J. Street Benicia

Tickets & Info 707.746.1269
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
"Voice of the Prairie"
 Oct 21-Nov 12
Beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

Vallejo actor takes on the Prairie

By Richard Freedman Times-Herald staff writer

BENICIA — Clinton Vidal knows a good role when he sees one. And he couldn't help but shoot for the dual roles of a young Davey Quinn and the older David Quinn in "The Voice of the Prairie," the latest Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production that opened this weekend.

In reading this play, designed to be done by three or six actors with minimal settings, costumes and props, it felt like an actor's piece," Vidal said. "That is to say, material that will focus on the skill of the performers more so than material that is played against a traditional set with all the trappings, bells and whistles."

So far, so good, said director Casy Cann, believing the dual roles have never been tackled by the same actor — at least in Cann's national search for a review.

Vidal, said Cann, "has worked tirelessly in the show and is gifted and accomplished enough to carry off this challenging feat well."

"Voice of the Prairie" is set in 1923 and transitions back-and-forth between the memories of two of the characters in 1935 and the reality of 1923 against the backdrop of the development of commercial radio.

If you go

What: "The Voice of the Prairie" by John Olive
 Where: B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
 Tickets: \$18-\$20
 Info: (707) 746-1269, beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

With the show running through Nov. 12, Cann is satisfied with the effort.

The play, continued Cann, "is very fun in its dated look at history when the subject matter is seen as the beginning of 'wireless' technology. Nowadays, everyone is hooked up or into some gadget. In its day, radio transmissions seemed miraculous."

The script is complex, Cann said, from a design and staging standpoint.

"Having enough hours in the day has been my biggest challenge," Cann said during rehearsals.

Other performances of note include Mark Hinds as Leon Schwab, Vicki Zabarte as Susie, Lexi Hart as Frankie Reed, Lam-

ont Young of Vallejo as the sheriff radio announcer, Jaffer and Ben Rev. James, and Dan Clark as Poppy, Frankie's father, and the Waterman Man.

"I have been fortunate beyond belief," Cann said.

The reason the play is audience appealing "is a tricky one," said Vidal's Vidal. "I find that I am very bad at predicting what will be appealing to an audience. If I have a favorable response to material and undertake it either as an actor interpreting a role or director interpreting a role, I give it my best shot. If I find that the audience will, too, in this regard, the effort, the work, gets the chance to speak for itself."

Vidal's acting goes back to the third grade in a play by the local parks and rec.

"They came to my school and made an announcement that they would be holding auditions after school. It sounded like fun," Vidal said. "I went and got cast."

At an early age, "I was intrigued by the world's films," Vidal said. "Once I was old enough to make the distinction that the giant monster was not really destroying the city, but, in fact, it was all make-believe, I realized that I thought acting in movies would be a lot of fun to do."

"The Voice of the Prairie" another hit from Benicia theater group | Daily Republic November 02, 2011 | Posted by Paula McConnell Page 1

'The Voice of the Prairie' another hit from Benicia theater group



"The Voice of the Prairie" continues through Nov. 12 at B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia.

In recent years, The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group graduated from predictable slap-stick farce to intriguing vehicles in theater that resonate with the audience for days. They have done just that with their production of "The Voice of the Prairie" written by John Olive and directed by the formidable Casy Cann.

"Voice of the Prairie"

- Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
- 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and Nov. 11-12
- 2 p.m. Sunday
- B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
- 746-1269
- <http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com>
- 3.5 stars out of 4

The group should also be complimented in their efforts of what is known in theatre as "color-blind" casting.

"The Voice of the Prairie" is a thought-provoking play in that it includes many facets of life. It is a show about life-long bonds of relationships, not only through family ties, but through business and personal interactions as well.

It is a story of great personal success, along with love and commitment intertwined with a bit of history

<http://www.dailyrepublic.com/features/entertainment/the-voice-of-the-prairie-another-hit-f...> 11/3/2011

2 pm. Located at B.D.E.S. Hall 140 West J. Street Benicia

Tickets & Info 707.746.1269
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

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arts and entertainment

A little 1970s nerd gets right back in town

By Tim Wane

PHOTOGRAPHY

While doing research for Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Voice of the Prairie," I was intrigued to learn that the first printed issue of "The Voice of the Prairie" was in the January 1973 issue of "The Voice of the Prairie" in 1973.



Chuck Shilling and Karen Kowalski star in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Voice of the Prairie."

People

KAREN KOWALSKI has retired her career with the publication of the magazine over a cover story that is a tribute to a local actor.

The magazine published an apology to the actor, saying it was a mistake to suggest that Mr. Kowalski was a drug addict.

Mr. Kowalski was a drug addict or was undergoing treatment for drug addiction. "In a recent issue of Star, we published headlines about Karen Kowalski that could be read to suggest that she was addicted to drugs," the apology read. "We apologize to Mr. Kowalski for our misrepresentation and will be making a substantial donation to charity on Mr. Kowalski's behalf for any harm that we may have caused."

Mr. Kowalski, said director Casy Cann, "has worked tirelessly in the show and is gifted and accomplished enough to carry off this challenging feat well."

Review

"The Voice of the Prairie"

8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, May 6 and May 13, 14, 20 p.m. Sunday and May 15

B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia

746-1269

<http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com>

by Tim Wane

PHOTOGRAPHY

While doing research for Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Voice of the Prairie," I was intrigued to learn that the first printed issue of "The Voice of the Prairie" was in the January 1973 issue of "The Voice of the Prairie" in 1973.

Mr. Kowalski was a drug addict or was undergoing treatment for drug addiction. "In a recent issue of Star, we published headlines about Karen Kowalski that could be read to suggest that she was addicted to drugs," the apology read. "We apologize to Mr. Kowalski for our misrepresentation and will be making a substantial donation to charity on Mr. Kowalski's behalf for any harm that we may have caused."

Benicia Old Town
THEATRE
Group

The Voice of the Prairie

by John Olive









October 21 - November 12, 2011

Directed by Casy Cann

Jeff Sloan - Stage Manager

Cast Portraits
Donated by
Joe Messina

Messina
PHOTOGRAPHY

BOTTG

Continued from Page A1

"It was a wonderful, nostalgic piece that is kind of a romantic time capsule from the age of radio."

The story, about a friendship between two Midwest teenagers-turned-adults, Davey Quinn and a blind girl named Frankie, covers a span of years from 1895 to 1923. Their friendship and funny episodes in their lives form the basis of the play; they grow, separate, then reunite years later after he becomes famous as a radio storyteller.

"It's very sweet," Vojvoda said. "We've got a wonderful cast, and lots of energy."

"It's a very talented cast, and I think it would be required to have a great cast for a show like this."

As opening night approaches, the cast and crew are busily preparing to bring Olive's tale to life, mindful of the high standards BOTTG has set for itself. Vojvoda said.

"It's a week before we open, so everything's kind of crazy: costumes, sets, everything is in disarray. Yet next week, amazingly, it all comes together," she said.

Lexi Hart and Lamont Young, along with veteran actor and member Dan Clark, Vojvoda's husband, are returning to the BOTTG stage. Joining them is Clinton Vidal, director of BOTTG's spring production, "The Nerd," and recently elected president of the theater company.

"What's nice for us, since we've been a community theater since 1964, we have a lot of people who come back," Vojvoda said.

Director Casy Cann, who will helm "Prairie," is another returnee. She previously directed BOTTG's production of "Daughters" in 2009.

Cann, who currently teaches drama at Contra Costa College, got involved with "Prairie" when one of the board members told her BOTTG was considering the play.

She read it and decided she wanted to be involved. So she requested an interview.

"They always interview directors, even ones who have directed there before," Cann said Tuesday. "I just really liked they play so I said, 'It's a big challenge!' — and it's a (very) big challenge."

Born in Berkeley, Cann is now a resident of Martinez. In 2004, she earned her master's degree in directing from the Actors Studio Drama School in New York. Prior to that she received her bachelor's in drama from Mills College.

Returning to BOTTG for "Prairie" is a lot less stress than the first time, Cann said.

"It's a lot of fun," she said. "The reason is that there is no producer at BOTTG. It's all volunteers, so I'm not looking for one person to go to for things."

"Everybody volunteers to do different aspects of the production, which is different from most professional jobs."

also speaks well of set designer Brian Hough.

"Brian is just amazing," she said. "He gave me a fabulous set. I'm not having any set changes, and every scene has a different location and some of it is 28 years apart from the previous scene."

That's a key part of the performance, Cann said. "Prairie" is not told in typical linear fashion. "So the audience also needs to listen a little closer, as if the show is radio theater."

"This is needed in order to know when the story has jumped to a cliff's edge in 1895 or is set in a radio studio in 1923."

"I think it will be fun, and I think the audience will be able to follow its non-linear story pretty well," she said.

Another thing that sets "Prairie" apart is its small cast of six, most of whom play multiple roles.

"Almost every actor plays multiple roles," Cann said. "It's what's called a 'real actor's piece,' because they each have their different way of going about representing the differences between the characters."

"The fact that I have two actors playing one female role 28 years apart is really, really fun. That they look nothing alike is really, really fun. That I've had to develop ways so the audience won't be confused that these are the same people 28 years apart has been really fun," she said.

"It's a really interesting show, and it's really different. It's not typical at all," Cann said. "The storyline doesn't even tell a lie."

BOTTG's opening night gala for "The Voice of the Prairie" is Oct. 21 at 8 p.m. at the historic B.O.F.S. Hall, 140 West J St. Doors open at 7 p.m. Admission is \$25 and includes tickets to the show and champagne. For more information, call 707-746-9526 or see beniciatowntheatre.com.



BOTTG readies 'romantic time capsule'

Theater group's latest offering, 'Voice of the Prairie,' to hit the stage next week

By Keri Lutz
Assistant Editor

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is preparing its newest production, set to open later this month, and members of the company can hardly contain their excitement.

BOTTG will debut John Olive's "The Voice of the Prairie" Oct. 21 with a special champagne gala opening.

"This is the show my husband and I happened to see about 25 years ago in Ashland, Oregon, at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival," Dyanne Vojvoda, longtime BOTTG publicist, said Tuesday. See BOTTG, Page A5.



LEXI HART and Dan Clark, above, during rehearsal for Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's "Voice of the Prairie," opening Oct. 21. Opposite, Clinton Vidal.



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group PRESENTS

REEFER MADNESS THE MUSICAL

Book and lyrics by KEVIN MURPHY
Music by DAN STUDNEY

4.20 THRU 5.19
Friday & Saturday 8 pm
Sunday Matinees
NEW TIME
2 pm
Located at
B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street
Benicia

Tickets & Info
707.746.1269

Directed by Matthew Teague Miller

www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

BOTTG PRESENTS

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group will perform "Reefer Madness: The Musical," directed by Matthew Teague Miller and running April 20 through May 19. Showtimes at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., are Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are available by calling 707-746-1269.



DAN CLARK.



By Keri Lutz
Assistant Editor

Everyone knows: Marijuana kills. At least, that's what everyone thought they knew in the first half of the 20th century. That misinformation —

spread eagerly by official propaganda — is the basis of the spoof "Reefer Madness: The Musical," which opens Friday, the latest production of Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. "It is a spoof of that whole movie genre," said BOTTG's Dan Clark. "of 'You look are' See BOTTG, Page A12

BOTTG

Continued from Page A1

going crazy. One toke of marijuana and they're going to be killing each other and killing the neighbors and raping, looting and pillaging. "It's all very tongue-in-cheek, and it's going to be great fun."

The stage musical is loosely based on the 1936 film "Reefer Madness," a cautionary-tale gone-wrong that exaggerated the effects of cannabis and sensationalized — in unintentionally hilarious ways — the lifestyle of marijuana users and the perils of associating with them.

Perhaps because of the frankly farcical source material, there hasn't been a lot of controversy surrounding BOTTG's choice of the musical, Clark said.

"I think that everybody realizes that this is sort of fun," he said. Still, it is a production theater-goers will want to leave the kids home for. "This is adult theater. When we do R-rated stuff or things that have language or themes, we try to be pretty upfront with people about, 'You know, this probably isn't for your kids,'" said Clark, former president and current vice president of BOTTG's board of directors.

BOTTG doesn't do children's theater — what it does, he said, is consistently excellent theater twice a year — well-acted, well-directed and well-designed.

Clark knows: He's worked with BOTTG

— doing everything from set design to acting, and sometimes filling multiple roles in one production — since 1972.

"It's been 40 years of fun, and 40 years of hard work," he said.

He said he's been less involved in "Reefer Madness" because of recent knee surgery. But that has given him a chance to be a fan again.

Clark admits he often gets so involved with a BOTTG production he is there every night to watch rehearsals, and "by the time opening night rolls around, it's sort of anticlimactic," he said. But not this time.

This time, "I want to see the whole thing from beginning to end on opening night just like everyone else."

"I think it's going to be great fun. I'm really looking forward to it. I've purposely stayed away from rehearsals because I want to see the finished product myself."

The theater group has planned a champagne gala for opening night, April 20, at which audience members can enjoy champagne with the cast after the show.

The thespians also are working with downtown eatery Lucca Bar and Grill on a dinner special — a throwback to earlier days, Clark said. "We started at first as a dinner theater. At one point we were the oldest running dinner theater west of the Mississippi," he said. They stopped doing dinner productions in the mid-1990s "because it got to be too much work," he said.

"This time we're doing a little step-back. We're offering a special meal-theater ticket deal

'Reefer' incites madness in Benicia

By Rich Freedman
Times-Herald staff writer

Thousands of motorists drive past the freeway marquee on I-780 in Benicia daily without flinching. An exhibit at the museum, perhaps an art show in city park. Nothing that would cause anyone to veer off the road.

Until now.

Apparently, "Reefer Madness," the Benicia Old Town Theatre musical opening tonight, ruffled the feathers of a few said birds in town.

Why, the show title followed by a contact number must have given someone a misinterpretation when the sign was removed by the Chamber of Commerce that supervises and approves all messages.

"We had gotten a call from the chamber that the city took the sign down. They said, 'You can't put a sign up if you use the word reefer,'" said Dan Clark, BOTTG vice president who timed.

"I'm starting to become unglued," Clark said. "Who did this?" Seems public works "heard complaints from people that the sign indicated marijuana businesses were moving from Vallejo to Benicia," said Clark. "I thought, 'What a bunch of baloney.'"

Eventually, said Clark, it was straightened out. While "reefer" may refer to a marijuana cigarette, "Reefer Madness" is a musical based on the original 1936 motion picture.

"To make a long story short," said Clark, "the city manager called me apologizing that it was a total mistake and that they're putting the sign back up."

Clark later learned that city employees believed the sign was a prank by some kids.

"Where would they get the letters is my question," Clark said.

It was Larry Clark (no relation), a retired Napa electronics teacher, who suggested the sign was a prank by some kids.

See Reefer, 7B



The cast of "Reefer Madness" by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group includes, top row, Matthew R. King, Alana Diaz, Michael Reardon, and Adam Serafino. Bottom row, Gianna Digregorio, Molly Millett, Adrian Swan, and Michael Doppe.

Reefer ...

Continued from 6B

gested "Reefer Madness." As for selecting the musical, "we're always looking for quirky shows," Clark said. It's an odd coincidence, said Clark, that the show opens April 20, or 420, known as "marijuana appreciation day."

"Pure dumb luck," Clark said. "We didn't even know about the significance. Someone said, 'That's brilliant,' and we're 'What are you talking about?'"

"It just happens to be when it fell on the calendar," Clark said. "That's the fabulous thing."

Beyond the apparently offensive-to-some title, BOTTG board president Clinton Vidal expects a well-attended run.

"We hope it does gangbusters. It's a good show," Vidal said. "The cast is having a good time and that's infectious. They're totally into it."

"There's a lot of buzz about it," Clark said.

If you go

What: "Reefer Madness: The Musical," by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
When: Today through May 19
Where: BDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
Tickets: General \$20, seniors/students \$18
Info: (707) 746-1269
beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com

News in Brief

BOTTG elects officers; Vidal voted in as president

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group held its annual Board of Directors vote Tuesday and Clinton Vidal, director of the group's 2011 spring production "The Need," was unanimously voted in as president for the next year.

Vidal will be assisted by vice president Dan Clark, who was elected vice president.

Chad Smith will remain one more year as secretary, and Kaitie Goodman was voted in as treasurer for another two years.

The current member at large, Vicki Lutz, will remain in office one more year, and three relatively new Benicia residents will join the cast: Jeff Sloan (originally from Chicago), Brian Hough (recent transplant from Maui) and Rick Jones.

The board's first order of business is making a director to helm the fall production of "Men of the Forest," which runs from Oct. 21 to Nov. 12 at the historic BDES Hall, 140 West J St.

BENICIA HERALD

Open auditions are planned for August. Also on the horizon for the group, according to a news release, is the design and construction of the theater group's float entry for the Third of July Parade.

Also this summer, BOTTG will start its search for the director of its spring 2012 musical. Choreographers, musical directors, singers and dancers are encouraged to contact the group. The spring production opens in April and will run five weekends.

For more information visit beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com, email beniciaoldtowntheatregroup@ms.com, or call 707-746-1269.

100 Years of Fashion fundraiser planned

The Benicia Historical Museum will host an afternoon of historic fashions presented by the Goodwill Bunch.

The event will be a look back to fashions from the 1850s through the 1940s. It will be held Saturday, July 9, at 11:30 a.m. in the museum's BDES Hall. A hot lunch will be served, and there will be a no-hesitance bar as well.

Tickets are available in advance only at \$25 per person at Workshop Benicia, 836

Review: 'Reefer Madness: The Musical' brings the laughs to Benicia - ContraCostaTimes.com Page 1 of 1

Review: 'Reefer Madness: The Musical' brings the laughs to Benicia

By Pat Craig Correspondent San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

ContraCostaTimes.com

There is probably something to offend everyone in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Reefer Madness: The Musical," currently onstage in the historic BDES Hall.

But if you ignore the parts that make steam pour out your ears like the noon whistle at a widget factory, and relax and enjoy this funny and surprisingly tuneful show, you'll have a much better time.

After all, the take-away message is, "be tolerant of what the other guy believes in because he probably thinks your most precious held beliefs are just as silly." You'll really have to search for the message, though; the main purpose of the show is to make you laugh like crazy, which the Benicia cast does frequently and noisily.

There have been a number of theatrical productions in recent years that spoof cult films and bad movies (see "Evil Dead: The Musical" or "Point Break Live"). This "Reefer" is only slightly related to the '30s movie with the same name. Instead, it takes off from the zaniness students found in the anti-propaganda film during midnight screenings beginning in the '60s.

It becomes obvious that we, the audience, are being trifled with as soon as Ted V. Bigorina, a school principal, begins to preach on the evils of marijuana, called reefer, 1930s-style. In a nutshell, our lecturer tells us, this demon weed will destroy our innocent youth. A puff or two of the stuff and they are addicts, riding a narcotic luge into the depths of hell, after debauching themselves and anyone else in the way, giggling in improper places, mocking everything Americans have held dear for centuries (and horror of horrors) developing a taste for jazz music.

To illustrate, the lecturer runs a clip of Cab Calloway singing, in a knowing way, about reefer and its joys. Faster than you can say "scare tactics," a clean-cut Jimmy (Michael Doppe) has become addicted to the weed through the efforts of Mae (Alana Diaz) and Jack (Michael Reardon), who run a house where addicts can smoke freely.

Soon Jimmy has left school and church, which he mocks, and poor little Mary Lane (Adria Swan) finds herself alone in the pew she once shared with Jimmy.

Naturally, she, too, becomes addicted to reefer and the tragedy unfolds quicker than a NASCAR pit stop.

Director Matthew Teague Miller has paced and cast the show brilliantly, with Bigorina, Swan, Doppe, Diaz and Reardon turning in excellent and wonderfully skilled comic performances. Those in the smaller roles also perform well, and Miller has made sure all of them get at least one star turn during the show.

Set designer Brian Hough's simple set is flexible and provides a large viewing screen, which often has smoke emerging from the film. Other set pieces are moved on and off the stage during brief blackouts.

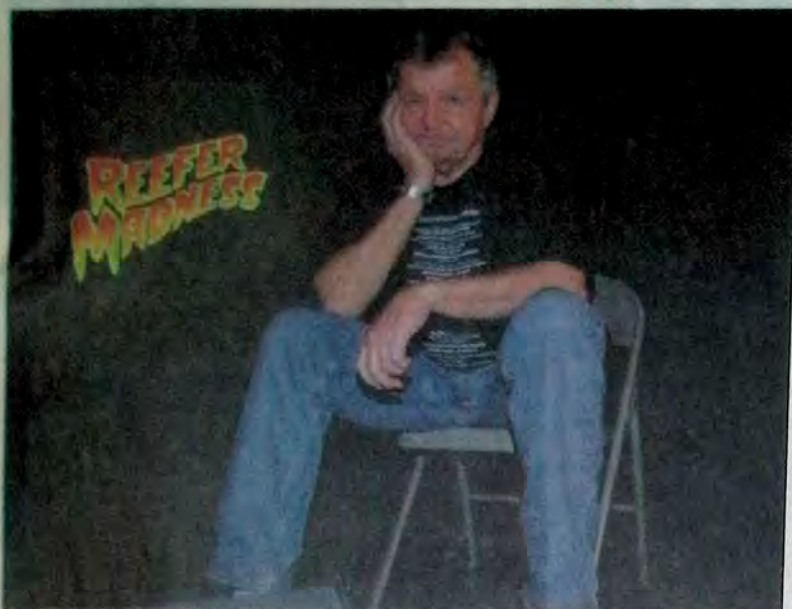
6B

THE ARTS

Times-Herald
Friday, April 20, 2012

Clark refuses to give acts the axe after 40 years in theater

By Rich Freedman
Times-Herald staff writer



The Benicia Old Town Theatre Guild's 'Reefer Madness,' which opens tonight, kicks off the 40th year that Dan Clark has been involved in one capacity or another with the organization.

As a Contra Costa County public defender, the now-retired Dan Clark was well schooled in working with those typically a bit short of cash. Basically, it primed Clark for running a community theater organization.

Yet, despite budget constraints, the occasional headache of an actor or director, and last second-theatrical disasters, Clark has remained an anchor at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group for 40 years.

Yes, 40. Four decades. Ten presidential terms. A milestone that few attain doing anything.

But here Clark is at 65, still working on stage and behind-the-scenes. Still climbing the stairs — albeit slowly with a new left knee — at the BDES Hall in downtown Benicia.

He's been in roughly 30 productions as an actor, dozens more doing every other chore it takes to keep a nonprofit functioning. He's been on the board a combined 20 years, including five terms as board prez. And he's in his fifth go-round as board vice president. He's also directed one production, though he'd rather leave that to the younger and more experienced.

"I laugh about my masochism level," grinned Clark. "But I'm still here."

He was a self-admitted "firebrand" at 25 when it all began in 1972, a mere eight years before the BOTTG was created. He worked a show backstage, eventually getting acting roles.

■ See Clark, 7B



SPORTS: Cal Maritime dedicat
ARTS: Dan Clark anchors theater
LOCAL: For now, CSU grad students

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group PRESENTS

REEFER MADNESS THE MUSICAL

Book and lyrics by KEVIN MURPHY
Music by DAN STODNEY

4-20 THRU 5-19

Friday 8pm
Saturday 8pm
Sunday Matinee 2pm

NEW TIME
Located at 800 E.S. Hall
148 West Street
Benicia

Tickets & Info
707-746-1269

Directed by Matthew Toague Miller

335 Special Show & Dinner Deal w/Lucca Bar & Grill
Dinner Deal Reservations @
www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com or facebook

Clark ...

Continued from 6B

Harry Diavatis, a mainstay at BOTTG during the early years, remembered directing Clark in 1979 for "A Flea in Her Ear."

"Dan has been a very good leader and staunch proponent of the BOTTG," Diavatis said. "He has been instrumental in its continued success."

Though the lead actors may get the plaudits, it didn't take long for Clark to appreciate the heroes behind the spotlight.

"I realized that for every person, every hour on stage, there were people spending dozens of hours off stage supporting that," Clark said. "Building sets, doing costumes and publicity and selling tickets, manning the bar. After a while, I thought, I should be giving back to that side of it and spend more time in production. Even when I do act, I'm involved in building sets."

Trying to convince others along the way that, perhaps, community theater means that — helping the community aspect of it and not using it as a launching pad for a career that won't likely ignite.

"We get actors who wander in here — and we're thankful for that and the many hours they put in and distance they travel to get here — but you never see them down building sets or picking up a paintbrush," Clark said. "It's a running joke that actors think the theater fairy shows up and supplies costumes and sets."

So, all these years later, Clark still does it, along with his wife, Dyanne Vojvoda, and a core of about a dozen volunteers.

Clark's seen the actors and actresses come and go. He understood moons ago he wasn't going to be the next George Clooney. Or, much earlier, Rosemary Clooney.

"People signed a petition years ago and told me not to do musicals," said Clark laughing, figuring he's been lead actor in three or four productions.

"A lot of shows, we do ensembles," he said. "It's equal parts that make the whole, which, I think, is a good thing for community theater. You don't like to get trapped into this 'star' thing."

However, Clark said he's not one to put the thumb to anyone's dream.

"They're going to have to learn the hard way," he said. "It's a tough business. When I was 20, 21, I toyed with the idea of doing it and realized I need more security. You have to have a huge ego and strength to take the rejection that happens all the time."

Still, he won't turn anyone away.

"If you're bitten by the bug, you're going to do it," Clark said. "And God bless you. Follow your muse."

Though Clark's not on stage for the latest BOTTG production — "Reefer Madness," which opens tonight — he expects to be back acting soon.

Clark's interest stays vibrant mostly when BOTTG strays from standard theater fare, such as "Fences" by August Wilson, or "The Great American Trailer Park Musical" or "Reefer Madness."

Still, he knows the tried and true have to be presented for the sake of keeping the doors open.

"It's tough," Clark said. "As I've aged, I've gotten more conservative. When I was younger, I was more of a firebrand. We should be doing this." But the economic reality sets in a little bit. You can't constantly lose money. You have to keep your head above water. You need to put balls in the seats."

Bottom line, said Clark, is that it is a business. "And we have to run it like one," he said. "And actors and directors are not particularly good business people."

Clark was into the BOTTG a decade when he

found Vojvoda via a mutual friend. They've been together 30 years and married for 20.

The problem, Clark said, is that they can't escape the theater.

"We never get away from it," he said. "It seems like it's all we talk about."

Since only the director and perhaps a freelance choreographer or musical director gets paid, all connected are volunteers, Clark acknowledged.

"And it's a lot of work. I've told people over the years, if you can't get off on standing in the back of the hall and watching the audience enjoy themselves and having them smile and shake your hand on the way out, this isn't for you. That's got to be your reward. Otherwise, it can be a thankless job."

Clark cherishes the friends he's met during 40 the years.

"The sad part sometimes is that you think you bond with a lot of the casts," Clark said. "You have all these affirmations, 'Oh, we're going to be best friends forever,' and you don't see any of these people again."

The comedy "Harvey" in 1973. The drama "Lion in the Winter." The farce "Tartuffe." All early acting gigs for Clark as he slowly turns the pages of a scrapbook documenting the 96 BOTTG productions.

"Periodically, I look at all these to remind myself how far I've sunk," he chuckled.

Clark said nothing is more true than a sign posted in front of the venue: "Put a little drama into your life. Join BOTTG."

BOTTG president Clinton Vidal said Clark's experience is evident.

"The longevity of the group and success is a large part due to Dan and Dyanne and the core that keeps the heart beat," Vidal said, adding that young people can learn from Clark about "a basic education how a community theatre runs."

'Reefer Madness The Musical' is intoxicatingly funny | Daily Republic
April 24, 2012 | Posted by Tony Wade

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'Reefer Madness The Musical' is intoxicatingly funny



BENICIA—It's a good thing I don't use marijuana, because if I did, the level of hilarity produced by the psychotropic drug combined with that induced by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest production "Reefer Madness The Musical" could possibly have triggered a near-fatal giggle overdose.

"Reefer Madness the Musical" is an off-Broadway show that's been around

since 1998. It is a satirical musical that riffs off the 1936 propaganda-turned-cult film "demon weed."

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

- "Reefer Madness The Musical"
- 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through May 19
- 2 p.m. Sundays May 6 and May 13
- B.D.E.S. Hall
- 140 W. J St. Benicia
- 746-1269
- <http://www.beniciaoldtowntheatregroup.com>
- three and a half stars out of four

BOTTG's production opened April 20 — or 4/20, which is called the "Marijuana Holiday" as some stoners decided years ago that 4:20 in the afternoon was the perfect time to smoke a doobie. Evidently there were some 4/20 celebrants present on opening night, as the guy in front of me at the ticket line reeked of ganja.

The show was basically about how Michael Doppe's character Jimmy gets turned from being a "good egg" into a "bad apple" by his marijuana use. Doppe deftly played both the wide-eyed square and a stoned animalistic lecher. He also shone on numbers like "The Brownie Song," that featured Grateful Dead-ish kaleidoscopic images projected on an upstage screen.

Petite Adria Swan played Doppe's girlfriend Mary Lane and appeared to be, as one of the lyrics to "Mary Jane/Mary Lane" described her, "sweet as Shirley Temple dipped in pudding." She had nice vocals on songs including "Lonely Pew," which featured the funny rhyming of "grent" and

<http://www.dailyrepublic.com/entertainment/reefer-madness-the-musical-is-intoxicatingly-f...> 5/4/2012

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